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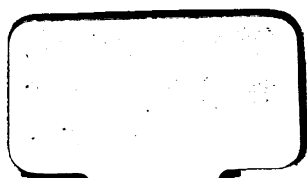
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# THE LAST CALL.



# THE LAST CALL.

*A Romance.*

BY

RICHARD DOWLING,

AUTHOR OF "THE MYSTERY OF KILLARD," "THE WEIRD SISTERS,"  
"SWEET INISFAIL," ETC.

*IN THREE VOLUMES.*

VOL. I.

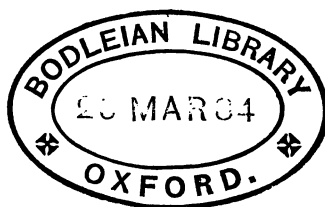
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# THE LAST CALL.

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Part I.

VOL. I.

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# THE LAST CALL.

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## CHAPTER I.

THE sun was low behind a bank of leaden cloud which stood like a wall upon the western horizon. In front of a horse-shoe cove lay a placid bay, and to the westward, but invisible from the cove, the plains of the Atlantic.

It was low water, and summer. The air of the cove was soft with exhalations from the weed-clad rocks stretching in green and brown furrows from the ridge of blue shingle in the cove to the violet levels of the sea.

On the ridge of shingle lay a young man, whose eyes rested on the sea. He was of the middle height and figure. Twenty-seven or

twenty-eight seemed to be his age. He had a neat, compact forehead, dark gray eyes, ruddy, full cheeks, a prominent nose, full lips, and a square chin. The face looked honest, good-humoured, manly. The moustaches were brown; the brown hair curled under the hat. The young man wore a gray tweed suit and a straw hat.

He lay resting on his elbow. In the line of his sight far out in the bay a small dot moved almost imperceptibly. The loungeer knew this dot was a boat: distance prevented his seeing it contained a man and a woman.

Dominique Lavirotte, the man in the boat, was of the middle height and figure, twenty-four years of age, looking like a Greek, but French by descent and birth. The eyes and skin were dark, the beard and moustaches black. The men of Rathclare, a town ten miles off, declared he was the handsomest man they had ever seen, and yet felt their

candour ill-requited when their sweethearts and wives concurred.

With Dominique Lavirotte in the boat was Ellen Creagh. She was not a native of Rathclare, but of Glengowra, the small seaside and fishing town situate on Glengowra Bay, over which the boat was now lazily gliding in the cool blue light of the afternoon.

Ellen Creagh was tall and slender, above the average height of women, and very fair. She had light golden-brown hair, bright lustrous blue eyes, and lips of delicate red. The upper lip was short. Even in repose her face always suggested a smile. One of the great charms of the head was the fluent ease with which it moved. The greatest charm of the face was the sweet susceptibility it had to smile. It seemed, when unmoved, to wait in placid faith the advent of pleasant things. During its moments of quiet there was no suggestion of doubt or anxiety in it. To it the world

was fair and pleasant—and the face was pleasant and wonderfully fair. Pleasant people are less degraded by affectation than solemn people. Your solemn man is generally a swindler of some kind, and nearly always selfish and insincere. Ellen Creagh looked the embodiment of good-humoured candour, and the ideal of health and beauty. She was as blithe and wholesome as the end of May; she was a northern Hebe, a goddess of youth and joy.

The name of the young man lying on the shingles was Eugene O'Donnell. He lived in the important seaport of Rathclare, where his father was the richest and most respected merchant and shipowner. There had James O'Donnell been established in business for many years, and they now said he was not worth less than a quarter of a million sterling. Mrs. O'Donnell was a hale, brisk, bright-minded woman of fifty-seven, being three

years her husband's junior. The pair had but one child, Eugene, and to him in due time all the old man's money was to go. The O'Donnells were wealthy and popular. The father had a slow, methodical way, which did not win upon strangers, but among those who knew him no one was more highly respected. Without any trace of extravagance, James O'Donnell was liberal with his money. He was a good husband, a good father, and a good employer.

He had only one source of permanent uneasiness—his son Eugene was not married, and showed no inclination towards marriage. The old man held that every young man who could support a wife should take one. He himself had married young, had prospered amazingly, and never for a moment regretted his marriage. He was prepared to give his son a share in his business, and a thousand a year out of the interest of his savings, if the



young man would only settle. But although Eugene O'Donnell was as good-humoured and good-hearted a young fellow as the town of Rathclare, or the next town to it, could show, and although there was not in the whole town one girl who would be likely to refuse him, and although there were plenty of handsome girls in Rathclare, Eugene O'Donnell remained obdurate. It was lamentable, but what could anyone do? The young man would not make love, the father would not insist upon his marrying whether he loved or no, and there being at Rathclare little faith in leap-year, no widow or maiden of the town was bold enough to ask him to wed her.

While the young man lying on the shingle was idly watching the boat, the young man in the boat was by no means idle. The sculls he was pulling occupied none of his attention. He swung himself mechanically back-

ward and forward. His whole mind was fixed on the face and form of the girl sitting in the stern.

"And so, you really must go back to Dublin?" he said ruefully.

"Yes," she answered with a smile. "I must really go back to Dublin within a fortnight."

"And leave all here behind," he said tenderly.

"All!" she exclaimed, looking around sadly. "There is not much to leave besides the sea, which I always loved, and my mother, whom I always loved also."

"There is nothing else in the place, I suppose, Miss Creagh, you love, but the sea and your mother?"

"No," she answered, "nothing. I have no relative living but my mother, and she and the sea are my oldest friends."

"But have you no new friend or friends?"

She shook her head, and leaning over the side of the boat, drew her fingers slowly through the water.

"The Vernons," she said, "are good to me, and I like the girls very much. But I am only their servant—a mere governess."

"A mere queen!" he said. "I have known you but a short time. That has been the happiest time of my life. I at least can never forget it. May you?"

Suddenly a slight change came over her. She lost a little of her gaiety, and gathered herself together with a shadow of reserve.

"I do not think, Mr. Lavirotte, I shall soon forget the many pleasant hours we have spent together and the great kindness you have shown to me."

"And you do not think you will forget *me*?"

"How can I remember your kindness and forget you?" she asked gravely.

"Yes, yes," he said eagerly, "but you know what I mean, and are avoiding my meaning. Perhaps I have been too hasty. Shall I sing you a song?"

"Yes, please, if you will row towards home."

Then he sang :

"The bright stars fade, the morn is breaking,  
The dew-drops pearl each flower and leaf,  
When I of thee my leave am taking,  
With bliss too brief.  
How sinks my heart with fond alarms,  
The tear is hiding in mine eye,  
For time doth chase me from thine arms :  
Good-bye, sweetheart, good-bye."

The boat was now well inshore.

"Lavirotte! Lavirotte's voice, by all the gods!" cried Eugene O'Donnell, raising himself into a sitting posture. "Doing the polite—doing the lover, for all I know. Why has he stopped there? He will begin again in a moment."

“When you go, Ellen, will you give me leave to bid you adieu in these words?”

“Mr. Lavirotte,” she said, in doubt and pain, “I am exceedingly sorry that——”

“It is enough,” he said. “Say no more. I am a ruined man.”

“He will not finish it,” said O'Donnell.  
“He is ungallant. I will finish it for him.”

“The sun is up, the lark is soaring,  
Loud swells the song of chanticleer ;  
The leveret bounds o'er earth's soft flooring ;  
Yet I am here.  
For since night's gems from heaven did fade,  
And morn to floral lips must hie,  
I could not leave thee though I said,  
Good-bye, sweetheart, good-bye.”

The girl raised her head and listened for a moment, and then bent her head in some confusion. There was to her a sense of surprise in feeling that this song had, bearing its present associations, been completed by an unknown voice.

Lavirotte noticed the look of disquietude on the girl's face, and said lightly and bitterly: "You need not be uneasy, Miss Creagh. I know the man who finished my song for me, when there was no use in my going on with it. He and I are rival tenors. I will introduce you to him when we get ashore. We are the closest friends. He is the best of good fellows, and reputed—ah, I envy him—to be a woman-hater."

At length the boat glided slowly through the green channel that led from the plain of the violet bay to the ridge of blue shingle.

Lavirotte handed the girl out as soon as they reached the beach, and, as he did so, said: "You have no objection to know my friend?"

She was anxious to conciliate him in any way she might. "No," she whispered. "What a lovely voice he has."

"Better than mine?" he asked abruptly and harshly.

"I—I," she hesitated, "am but a poor judge."

"Which means," he said bitterly, "that you are a good judge, and decide against me."

By this time they were close to where O'Donnell was. He was standing, and looking out to sea.

"Comrade," said Laviotte, touching him on the shoulder, "I am delighted to see you. I am in sore need of a *friend*. Miss Creagh has admired your singing very much. Mr. O'Donnell—Miss Creagh."

"Am I dreaming," thought O'Donnell, "or is this beauty real?"

## CHAPTER II.

THERE was around Dominique Lavirotte an air of mystery which kept the good simple folk of Glengowra at bay. Although, theoretically, Frenchmen have always been popular in Ireland, this applies rather to the mass than to the individual.

There was nothing repulsive about Dominique Lavirotte. On the contrary, he had attractive manners, and although he spoke English with a broken accent, he spoke it fluently and faultlessly. He was agreeable in company, well-read, and possessed a shallow encyclopædic knowledge, by means of which he was enabled to give great brilliancy and point to his conversation.



Yet at certain moments he was taciturn, and if one attempted to break in upon his reserve he turned swiftly and snarled even at his best friend.

According to his own account, he was descended from Louis Anne Lavirotte, medical doctor, born at Nolay, in the diocese of Autun, somewhere about a hundred years ago, who was a most skilful physician, and one well versed in the English language. This dead doctor of a hundred years ago had devoted much of his attention while on earth to more or less obscure forms of mental disease, and had written a treatise on hydrophobia.

Dominique was very proud of this learned ancestor, and paid his relative of the last century the compliment of devoting some of his own time to the consideration of abnormal mental developments. Indeed, some of those who knew him best said that there was

a twist in his own mind, and that under extreme provocation, mental or physical, the brain would give way.

Lavirotte and O'Donnell were as close friends as it is possible for men to be; and, notwithstanding the ten miles which separated their homes, they saw much of one another. Each was young and enthusiastic, each sang tenor, and sang uncommonly well.

In the town of Rathclare, no young man was more popular than Eugene O'Donnell, and the people there thought it a thousand pities that he should select as his favourite friend a man who was not only not a resident of Rathclare, but a foreigner, with mysterious ways and an uncertain temper. O'Donnell laughed off all their expostulations and warnings, and said that in so far as his friend was a stranger and afflicted with a bad temper, there was all the more reason why someone should do him any little kindness he could.

But the people of Rathclare shook their heads gravely at the young man's temerity, and prophesied that no good would come to O'Donnell of this connection. They did not like this foreigner, with his strange ways and mysterious retirements into himself. They were free and open-hearted themselves, and they liked free and open-hearted souls like O'Donnell. They did not like swarthy skins ; and now and then in the newspapers they read that men with swarthy skins drew knives and struck their dearest friends ; that foreigners were treacherous, and not to be trusted with the lives, into the homes, or with the honour of law-abiding folk. They knew, it being a seaport, that foreigners spoke a gibberish which they affected to understand, and which was in reality no better than the language of Satan. Once a Greek, an infamous Greek, had been hanged in their town for an intolerable crime

of cruelty committed on board ship ; and somehow, ever since then, all foreigners, particularly swarthy foreigners, seemed in their eyes peculiarly prone to atrocious cruelties.

What a luxury it must have been for this swarthy man of uncertain temper to meet and speak with Ellen Creagh, who was the very embodiment of all that is fair in the rich, warm sense of fairness in the North ; and free in the sense of all that is open and joyous, and full of abounding confidence, in the North !

During the fortnight in which he had been admitted to what he considered the infinite privilege of her society, he had fallen helplessly, hopelessly, madly in love. He had drunk in the subtle poison of her beauty with an avidity almost intolerable to himself. All the poetry and passion of his nature had gone forth ceaselessly towards that girl, as only

the poetry and passion of southern blood can go forth. The violence of his feelings had astonished even himself. These feelings had grown all the more intense by the fierce repression in which he had kept them. For until that day in the boat he had never seemed to take more than a passing, polite interest in Ellen. Even then, in his dark and self-restrained nature, he had given no indication of the struggle within. The frenzy of his worship found no expression, and he took his dismissal with as much apparent indifference as though he had put the question to her merely out of regard to the wishes of others.

Yet when he said the words, "I am a ruined man," he meant the words, or rather he meant that he was determined to take an active part in his own destruction.

"If I die," he thought, "what is death to me? The sun is dead, the moon is dead, the

stars are dead, earth is dead, and perdition will be a release from this valley of phantoms. When life is not worth living, why should one live? I will not live. I have no cause against her, but I have cause against myself, for I am a failure."

He had determined to make away with himself; he had made up his mind that he would not survive this terrible disappointment; he would go home that night and take some painless and swift poison, and so pass out of this vain world to the unknown beyond; he would not declare his intention to anyone, least of all to O'Donnell, whose voice he recognised in the second stanza of the song; he knew where he could get the poison—from a friendly apothecary. They would hold an inquest on him, no doubt, and discover that he had done himself to death. Her name might even get mixed up in the affair, but he could not help that. He meant

to do her no harm ; he simply could not and would not endure.

When that meeting took place on the beach, whereat he introduced Ellen to O'Donnell, he had noticed the latter's start of amazed admiration.

"What," thought Lavirotte, "is he hit too ; he, the invincible ! he, the adamantine man, who has hitherto withstood all the charms of her lovely sex ? It would be curious to watch this. Will he too make love, and fail—succeed ? Ah."

When this thought first occurred to Lavirotte he paused in a dim, dazed way. Of all men living he wished best to O'Donnell, now that he might regard himself as dead.

"If I am to die and she is to love, would it not be best that she should love him ?"

And while he was thinking thus, and as he was mentioning his friend's name to her, he saw her, too, start and seem for a moment

confused. He could easily understand why it was O'Donnell had started. Such beauty as hers appeared potent enough to infuse the Belvidere Apollo with action. But why should she start? Woman is not overwhelmed by the beauty of man, as man is by the beauty of woman. Here it was that the demon of jealousy first entered the soul of Dominique Lavirotte; here it was he first inhaled the mephitic breath of jealousy, destined to poison all his life and to embitter the last moment of his existence.

As the three turned away and left the blue shingle for the yellow road, the sun fell behind them, and almost imperceptibly the gray dusk of twilight gathered in the east. Overhead the blue of day was becoming fainter and fainter, making way for the intenser blue of night.

Neither of the men seemed disposed to speak. The heart of each was full of



new emotion—one of love, the other of jealousy; one of the first rapturous buoyancy of dearest hope, the other of degrading care.

Nothing but the most ordinary common-places were uttered that night; and after the leave-taking each went a different way—she to the modest lodging where she spent her brief holiday with her mother; Laviotte to his quiet room, and O'Donnell back to Rathclare by the latest train leaving the village that night.

When the last-mentioned got home, he astonished his father and mother by walking into the room where they were sitting, and saying abruptly:

“Sir, you have often advised me to marry, and I have put the matter off. Are you still of your former mind?”

“God bless my soul!” cried the father in astonishment. “God bless my soul, Eugene,

what's the matter?" He could get no further than this with surprise, and the question he asked was put merely as a matter of form, and not from any desire to ascertain the condition of his son's mind.

But the mother was quicker—took in the whole situation at once, plunged at the heart of things, and asked breathlessly: "Eugene, who is she?"

He coloured slightly and drew back. His father was too slow, and his mother too quick for him. He preferred his mother's mode of treating the matter. The word "she" brought back to his enchanted eyes the vision he had seen on the beach. He said to himself: "My mother has no right to be so quick. For all I know to the contrary, she may be engaged to Laviotte." Then aloud he said: "Mother, I assure you, there is no 'she.' I never said two civil words to any girl in all my life."

"Eugene," she said, dropping into her lap the woollen stocking she was knitting for him, "no young man ever yet thought of marriage until thinking of some girl had put the thought into his head."

He felt in a way flattered and fluttered. It was pleasant even for a moment to fancy that his mother, although she knew nothing of Miss Creagh, had suggested the notion he might marry her. He laughed and shook his head, and laughing and shaking his head became him.

His mother looked at him half sadly, and thought: "No girl in all the world could refuse my boy—my handsome boy, my noble boy. And now one of them is going to take him away from me, who reared him, and have known him every hour since he was born."

"Eugene," said the father deliberately, "do I understand that you wish me to give you my opinions on marriage?"

The young man burst into a loud laugh. He had got far beyond the theoretic aspect of the affair now, and his father's opinion would have made very little impression indeed when compared with the impression Ellen Creagh had left upon his heart.

After this the three talked upon the subject of Eugene's possible marriage, he telling them no more about the adventure on the beach than that the notion of marriage had been put into his mind by the sight of a most estimable young lady, in every way suited to him, but of whom he had only the slightest knowledge up to this.

That night, when Ellen Creagh found herself in her own room, no thoughts of love were in her head. A feeling of pity for the fair young man she had met was uppermost in her head. It was not sentimental pity, but pity of a much more substantial and worldly kind.

She had a letter to write, and sat down to write it. It began, "My dear Ruth," and continued to narrate certain trivial matters connected with seaweed and shells. Then it went on to say: "I have seen young Mr. O'Donnell, son of your father's great friend, here. I was quite startled when I heard the name. I was introduced to him by a friend who had told me of him before." When she had finished her letter, she addressed it to Miss Vernon, Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin. She added a postscript, saying: "I hope you will soon get out of Dublin. You must be weary of it this lovely weather. I shall write again in a few days."

Then she stood awhile at the table, musing over the events in the boat. "He could not have been serious," she thought. "I daresay if I had looked at his face I should have seen him smiling. Anyway, he took it very quietly."

That night Dominique Lavirotte slept little.

“Though he were my friend over and over again,” he cried passionately, “he shall not. No! Not if I were to——” Here he covered his face with his hands. “What a horrible thought! I can see his white face now in the moonlight. Why is it white? Why is it moonlight? Oh, God! was beauty ever such as hers?”

### CHAPTER III.

IT was in the full height of summer, and by the bland sea, and while gathering a bouquet of wild flowers for a girl clad in white, and sitting on a mound hard by, that Eugene O'Donnell had for the first time the courage to tell himself he was in love. A minute before and he had stood in great fear of this said love—it had seemed silly, childish, unworthy of a full-grown man in the perfect possession of all his faculties. And now, all at once, even while his back was towards her, and he was not under the glamour of her eye, the magic of her touch, the mysterious fascinations of her motions, when, apparently, nothing was going

on in the bare daylight but the tranquil ripple of the waves on the shore below, this fear left him, and all at once he confessed to himself his love, and began to glory in it.

Once the flood-gate was broken down his nature knew no pause, saw no obstacle, appreciated no difficulty. Turning round hastily, with the flowers in his hand and a laugh upon his lips, such a laugh as he had never laughed before, for now the whole nature of the man was stirred, he cried: "What a fool I have been, Ellen." It was the first time he had called her by her name, and yet it seemed old and familiar to him. "What a fool I have been," he said, "to bother about these flowers."

She blushed, and looked up timidly, and looked down bashfully, and smiled, and moved as though to rise, and then sat still. She was not familiar with her name upon his lips. "Eugene," to her mind, seemed familiar, for from one reason or another, perhaps the



love of brevity, she so called him when she thought of him. But to hear him call her Ellen was as though her secret had been penetrated, and the fact that she called him Eugene laid bare.

“What a fool I have been to gather these idle flowers,” he repeated. “They are but the symbols of what I could say so much better in words. May I speak?”

She grew red, and then deadly pale, and seemed about to faint. Her lips opened, but no sound came.

“Whether you give me leave or not,” he said, “I must. Ellen,” he went on, “I think there is at this moment but one thing I believe impossible, and it is that I could ever go away from you. I never was in love before, and I don’t exactly know the regular thing to say, but I’ll tell you how I feel. If you were to get up off that mound now and walk away, supposing back to Glengowra or

to the world's end, I'd follow you. And I'd never cease to follow you, even beyond the world's end, until you turned back and put your hand in mine. That's better than these flowers," he said, tossing the bouquet from him. "It's straighter, anyway, Ellen. Will you give me your hand, dear?"

He called her "dear," and after a little while her hand was raised slightly from where it lay, and he took it, and she let it bide with him.

So the stupid flowers lay—nowhere; and two pure hearts, sweet with God's goodliest graces, were opened to the understanding of one another.

Then came moonlight nights to make the rich completion of the full day. He sang to her among the rocks, with the cool fresh sea washing beneath their unwearied feet. She sat clasped to him, and glad to be so clasped; and he sat strong beside her, and conscious

of his strength. There was no worshipping on his part, no bowing down before a golden image. He took her to his heart in the beauty of her wholesome girlhood, as one takes a melody or a flower, without question and without any exaggeration of dearness beyond the exaggeration compelled by all beautiful things.

These moonlit nights amid the rocks were the dearest things which had been, up to that, with him. There was no impediment in the course of his true love; his father was affluent; he had explained the whole matter at home; he had brought his sweetheart home, and there had she been approved of. Her mother saw no reason why the handsome, good-natured, good-humoured, well-off young man should not marry her beautiful daughter; and the daughter, on her part, saw all the reasons between heaven and earth, and several others which had no existence

in heaven or earth or the region between, why she should marry him.

It was their custom in these moonlight nights to stroll down to that cove where their first meeting had taken place, and where the glamour of her beauty had first fallen upon him. Here, of nights, were privacy, the moon and the sea, and the perfections lent to the moon and the sea by the cliffs and the rocks and the sounds of the sea (that are subtler than any voice); and now and then the sounds of the land, which take away the aerial perspective of the sea and bring to the soothed eye visions of homesteads and fallows, of sleeping woods and gentle useful beasts, of pious folk at rest by night and pious folk at rest for ever; and, over all, the limitless quiet of night.

Here on several occasions they sat for hours, from the late sunset, through the late dusk, into the dark. And once or twice,

when he bade her good-bye at her mother's gate, he stole back again to the cove which had been the theatre of the magic drama in which he was acting. He now lived in the village, and often sat at the cove until the blue dawn blotted out the bluer night, and the seagulls awoke, and the sails of the fishing-boats out in the bay were trimmed for home.

All this time, though he knew it not, a shadow dogged him, an evil shadow, a morally misshapen shadow, a pitiless dark shadow, that hid here and there where it could, behind wall, or tree, or rock, and ever glared unwholesomely.

The shadow of a swarthy man, of a man that showed his teeth in the moonlight and fumbled something in his pocket; a sinister stealthy shadow, that boded good to no one, lurked, and dodged, and followed in the footsteps of the lovers like the evil genius of their career.

When all had been settled between the lovers, Ellen had written to Mrs. Vernon and obtained release from her duties in that household. A month had now gone by since that meeting on the shingle, and it was arranged that in another month the wedding was to take place. The course of true love was running as smooth as the planets in their orbits. The happiest man and woman in Ireland were Eugene O'Donnell and Ellen Creagh. As the days went by that cove grew dearer to his heart ; and even now, when the moon was making moonlight for lovers somewhere else, he, Eugene O'Donnell, could not keep away from it, nor could he sleep.

One night he left her at her mother's gate and walked slowly down the road to the cove. It was dark for a summer night. Yet still there was light enough to see a large object, say the figure of a man, fifty yards off. He knew the ground as a farmer knows his farm.

Following the declivity of the road he soon arrived at the broken ground. Here was a high rock on the right, high enough to conceal a man; and here, behind this rock, was hidden a man with gleaming teeth, and in his right hand a gleaming blade.

As O'Donnell drew near the rock the man sprang forth, seized the other by the throat with the left hand, and, whirling up his right, whispered: "You shall never marry her."

"Lavirotte! Lavirotte! My God, Lavirotte, are you mad?"

"Yes, and you are dead."

The hand holding the knife descended swiftly.

## CHAPTER IV.

INSTINCTIVELY O'Donnell shot his left hand upward and seized the descending wrist. But the force in Lavirotte's arm was too great to be overcome. The blow was diverted; but the long, keen blade tipped the shoulder, tore through the cloth of the coat, and buried itself in the flesh, just above the shoulder-blade.

"Heavens and earth, man! What's the matter?" cried O'Donnell, rendered almost powerless, more by astonishment than pain.

"Death!" cried the infuriated man—"your death!—that's what's the matter." And, withdrawing the knife, he raised his arm once more aloft.



O'Donnell now plainly saw that he was indeed dealing with a madman, or, at least, with a man who seriously intended taking his life.

Still retaining his hold on the right wrist, he seized Laviotte by the throat and shook him violently. The pain in his shoulder was nothing. It was no more than if he had been touched by a piece of iron just uncomfortably hot. Yet he felt confused and queer in his head, as though he had received the blow on his head, rather than on his shoulder.

Laviotte now seized O'Donnell by the throat, and for a while, with the two hands raised in the air—the one holding the knife, the other the wrist of the hand that held it—the two men struggled fiercely.

It was a matter of life and death. O'Donnell had now lost all care for the cause of the attack, and was simply engaged in a brute

attempt to defend his life against a brute attack. Both men were mad. Both men had now lost everything but the instinct of victory. All the faculties of each were concentrated upon the muscles each used—upon the advantages each gained—upon the chances each afforded. Each now meant to kill, and to kill speedily—to kill with all the force, all the power, all the devices of his body.

One was armed and whole; the other was unarmed and hurt. Both were sensible that this conflict could not last many minutes.

The two twisted and writhed and struggled abroad on the open way. Now they swayed this way, now that. Now, as though one were about to fall; now, as though the other. Now one strove to throw the other by the aid of mere weight and muscle; now the other sought to win by the force of strangulation. Meanwhile, above the heads of both rose the

two upstretched arms—one hand clasped around a wrist, one hand holding a bloody knife.

The two men's faces were livid. They breathed only now and then, and with terrible difficulty. Their eyes were dilated and protruding, the nostrils wide set and quivering.

For some time, he knew not how long—he never knew how long the fight lasted—O'Donnell had felt something warm trickling down his back. He was bleeding freely. He was half suffocated. He felt he must succumb. For an instant everything was dark. Suddenly he saw once more; his vision, his senses were restored, but only to reveal to him the fact that his powers were failing swiftly.

The two men rocked and swayed in the broad roadway leading towards the cove. Neither knew nor cared which way he went,

so long as he might cling to the other. At the moment when O'Donnell's faculties returned, after that instant's unconsciousness, the two men were struggling a few feet from the rock behind which Lavirotte had hidden.

"Now," thought O'Donnell swiftly, "for one last effort; if I fail he will kill me."

Suddenly relaxing his knees, he stooped so as to bring his head on a level with the shoulder of his antagonist; then, loosing his hold of Lavirotte's throat, he seized him by the ankle, and, putting all his strength into his right arm and back, he sought to lift and throw the other. But his strength was gone; his head was dizzy; his eyes grew dim. Finally, all was dark once more. He lurched heavily forward, striking his antagonist in the chest with his head.

Lavirotte stumbled and fell backwards. O'Donnell struggled for a moment to regain his upright position, but his strength was

spent ; he was unconscious, and subsided in the middle of the road.

Now was Laviotte's opportunity. O'Donnell could not have resisted a child. The most cowardly cut-throat that ever lifted steel need have no fear of him.

The darkness increased as the night went on. By this time it had grown so great that it was impossible to see an arm's length. The sky, for all the light it gave, might as well have been the solid earth. No sound stirred the profound silence save the mellow washing of the waves upon the shore. It was sultry and suffocating. Now and then the air panted, beating this way and that in little hot gusts that brought no freshness and left no coolness behind. Although the murmuring of the sea filled the night with a low plaintive music, the silence seemed to deepen as the minutes went by.

At length a form began to stir. For a

while the man did not seem to know where he was, or the circumstances which had led to his condition. It was only by feeling around him he was able to know he was in the open air. He felt the road, the stones, the sun-baked clay of the road. Then he listened intently awhile, and by his hearing confirmed the notion that he was in the open air. That was the murmur of the sea. These little puffs of wind that beat against his face showed he was not between walls.

Ah! Now something of it came back. There had been a struggle of some kind, a fight with someone. What was it exactly? This was the road to the cove. Of course it was. The sea lay beyond there somewhere. To the right, to the left, no matter where, the sea was somewhere near. It would be good to get down to the sea and lie down in its cool waters, for he was aching and burning. What a fearful thirst! His tongue was

parched, baked dry as the baked clay on which he sat. He had been hurt, how or why he could not recollect. There had been a fight. That was all right. But why he had fought or with whom, these were the mysteries.

Oh! why did they not bring him some water? He was dying of thirst, and no one would come. He didn't remember going to bed. He never felt so sleepy in all his life before. It was a kind of deathly sleep, a sleep with no mercy in it, a sleep that promised no ease, no repose, no alleviation of the torturing uncertainties. Such a bed, too; it was as hard as iron. What did they mean by giving so sleepy a man such a bed?

What nonsense it was for his mother to sing a lullaby. He was a grown man, and needed no such inducement to sleep. Oh,

this terrible, tyrannical sleep that brought no ease, no repose.

How strange that the cathedral organ should be booming away in the dark! If service was going on, why not have lights?

Lights! Was it magic? No sooner did he think of them than the whole cathedral blazed out for one brief moment, and then fell back into darkness again. It was marvellous, incredible; and the cathedral seemed so vast, vaster than the reason could believe, although the eye had seen it. And, then, there was the music once again. Why did the organist play only when the lights were out? That was the swell organ. It was the loudest organ he had ever heard. What seemed most incredible of all was the organ was big enough to fill the church, and did fill it, until it made the windows, the pillars, ay, the very ground itself tremble.



Ground! Ay, surely it was the ground. How extraordinary that he should be lying on the ground!

What was this so delicious and cool? Cool and refreshing after that horrible dream of fighting with someone, and then waking on a road.

And yet there was something in that dream, for this was a road.

He sat up.

It was very extraordinary. It was the most extraordinary thing that had ever happened to him in his life. Was he alive, in the old familiar sense of that word? Of course he was, for this was a road, and he knew it was a road, and——

Lightning—thunder—rain.

What was that he had seen beside him? The rain was refreshing. It was cooling his head, collecting his thoughts.

What was that he had seen beside him ?

More lightning—thunder—rain.

What was that beside him ?

Lavirotte—dead.

## CHAPTER V.

LAVIROTTE dead ! Absurd.

Now he remembered how it had been.

Lavirotte had sprung upon him out of the shadow of that rock, and seized him and sought to kill him, because Lavirotte was mad with jealousy, or with southern blood, or with something else or other, no matter what—mad anyway. And there was that burning sensation in his shoulder, and the fever in his blood, and that—ugh !—clammy feeling down his back. But Lavirotte dead ?

No ; the very notion was preposterous.

Now he remembered the struggle.

Another flash. Another roar of thunder.  
Another deluge of rain.

He looked wonderfully like death in that blue light. And yet in that struggle he (O'Donnell) did not remember having struck the other. It was a common tussle, an irregular wrestle, with the supreme interest of a knife added by Laviotte. That was all. Yet he lay there motionless, and it must have been a considerable time since he fell.

With great difficulty and a sense of oppression, O'Donnell rose partly, and crawled towards the prostrate man.

"Dominique," he whispered, "Dominique, what is the matter? Rouse up."

There was no response. The form of the Frenchman lay there motionless, inert, nerveless. O'Donnell raised an arm; it fell back again into the mud of the road, unsustained by any trace of vitality.

"What can it be?" thought O'Donnell, straightening himself, as another flash of

lightning revealed the pallid face of Lavirotte. He waited for the thunder to pass, and then, putting his hands around his mouth, shouted with all the strength that was left in him :

“Help! Help! Help!”

The storm had not been unnoticed in the village, and many were awake.

James Crotty, boatman, had been roused by the first peal of thunder, had filled a pipe, undone the door of his cottage, and come out to see how the night went. His boat was moored in the cove, but as there was no wind his mind was easy about her. His wife and little ones were safe asleep in the cottage, and his mind was easy about them. At the best of times he was a light sleeper and a great smoker, and took a boatman's interest in the weather, fair or foul, but had a particular interest in the great conflicts of nature.

While he was standing in the doorway he was within a few hundred yards of the two men below near the cove. His cottage was about half-way down the road, and it was quite possible to hear an ordinary speaking voice from where the men now were.

When O'Donnell's loud cry for help rang out in the stillness, Crotty started, and then listened intently. No other sound followed. There was no mistaking the nature of that cry. He had heard the word as distinctly as though it were spoken in the dark room behind him. "It can't be any of the men," he said, meaning the fishermen of the place. "It is too early for any of the boats to be back, and too late for them to be going out. What can have brought anyone down there at this hour? I'd better go and see, anyway."

He went down the little garden in front of his cottage, and gained the road. He turned to the left. Then he went on slowly,

cautiously, keeping to the middle of the road.

“Who’s there?” he called out. “What’s the matter?”

“Here,” cried O’Donnell faintly, “This way. Help.”

The rain had now ceased, and the silence was intense. Far out there in the darkness was the soft washing of the wavelets on the shore. No other sound burdened the night.

Guided by O’Donnell’s voice, Crotty now walked on with decision.

“What’s the matter?” he called out again. “Who is it?”

O’Donnell’s voice answered from the darkness. “It is I, O’Donnell.”

“Oh, Mr. O’Donnell, is it you? What’s the matter?”

“I’m hurt, badly I think, and here is Mr. Lavirotte insensible. I know how I got my

hurt." Crotty was now close to the speaker. "That makes no difference ; but I don't know how Mr. Lavirotte was hurt."

"Maybe 'twas a fight," said Crotty, in a tone of interest. A fight is always an interesting thing, but a fight here and on such a night as this was something which Crotty did not feel himself justified in treating with anything but the greatest respect.

"Never mind what has been," said O'Donnell feebly. "The thing is to get him to the village and call a doctor. I can't be of much help. I am quite weak. Come now, Crotty, look sharp. Knock them up at Maher's, tell them to put a horse in, and be back here in no time, and let there be a doctor at hand by the time we get back. Run now. Don't lose a minute."

"And leave you here by yourself, hurt ? Aren't you strong enough to walk as far as Maher's, or my place even ?"



"No. Be off. Every second you wait is killing us."

Crotty started at the top of his speed, and in less than half-an-hour returned with a car from Maher's hotel. He had brought a lantern, and he and the driver carried Laviotte to the car, and sat him up on it. Then Crotty got up and held the insensible man. O'Donnell got up on the other side, and thus they drove to the hotel.

Here the doctor was awaiting them.

"What's this, O'Donnell?" he said. He knew the two men thoroughly. "You two have been quarrelling. What is the meaning of this? Blood on both! Nasty scalp wound. Don't think the bone is broken. Clear case of concussion. What did you hit him with?"

"Nothing," said O'Donnell. "Is it dangerous?"

"Dangerous! I should think it is dan-

gerous. Dangerous enough to mean manslaughter, it may be."

"Good heavens!" cried O'Donnell, faintly.

"I assure you I never struck him."

"All right. Stick to that. It never does to make admissions. What's the matter with you? Blood and mud all over. Cut off his coat. Here, give me the scissors. No bleeding except here. Ugly cut."

"Is it much?" said O'Donnell, very weak now.

"Yes, it's a good hit."

"Will it do for me?"

"I don't think so, if you have luck. He has a much better chance of going than you. What *did* you hit him with, O'Donnell? It was a terrible blow. Something blunt—a stone, or something of that kind. It's a downright shame that two young fellows like you, of good education, and so on, should fall to hacking and battering one another in

this brutal way, and at midnight, too. It's more like assassination than fighting. A woman in the matter, eh?"

"For heaven's sake, hush, O'Malley."

"All right. I'm not a magistrate. My business is with the bruises, not with the row, or the cause of the row; but I'm sure it's a woman. Men don't go ripping one another open for anything else nowadays."

"I swear to you, O'Malley, as far as I am concerned, there was no row, and that I did not strike him."

"Who else was with you?—although I'm not in the least curious. That was a tremendous blow. I can't make it out. If he had stabbed you first, I don't think you could have struck that blow. I can't make it out. I can't do any more for you now. You mustn't lie on it, you know."

"O'Malley," said O'Donnell, "I want you to do me a great favour."

"Oh, my dear fellow, you needn't be afraid that I'm going to swear an information. It's nothing to me if two fellows go hacking and slashing at one another. I shouldn't like to see either of you killed outright for the finest woman in creation."

"Do stop, O'Malley, like a good fellow. I'll tell you what you must do for me. I want you to break the matter to her to-morrow morning the first thing."

Suddenly the manner of the glib doctor changed. "My dear fellow, I have been very impertinent, very thoughtless, very rude, and as soon as you are quite well you shall punch my head, and welcome. I had clean forgotten that you are going to be married. When you do punch my head, I hope it won't be quite so terribly as poor Lavirotte's. I'll do anything in the world I can for you. What am I to say? She's at her mother's, I suppose."

"Yes ; she's at her mother's. The fact is, I don't exactly know what to say. I can't tell her the truth."

"And you want me to tell her a lie, eh?"

"No, no ; I would not be so rude as to ask you to do anything of the kind. The fact of the matter is, I can tell and trust you——"

"Stop, O'Donnell, don't. Don't tell me anything you want to keep quiet. If you told me now 'twould be known in China at breakfast-time. I'm dying to know all about it, but, as your friend, I recommend you not to tell me a word of it. What shall I tell her?"

"That I have been a little hurt."

"Lie No. 1. You are a good deal hurt."

"That I shall soon be all right."

"Lie No. 2. For a man who wouldn't be so rude as to ask me to tell a lie, you are getting on marvellously."

“And that you do not know how I got the hurt.”

“Truth this time, by Jove, for a change. And most unpleasant truth, too, for I really am most curious to know.”

“Then you shall know.”

“No; as your friend I decline to listen. There, I promised to do the best for you. I’ll lie as much as ever I choose, and confound your politeness for not asking me. There, now, you mustn’t speak any more. You must keep as quiet as possible.” And after a few words more of instruction the busy, talkative little doctor left O’Donnell.

Lavirotte had been put in another room. O’Malley went to him, and again examined his condition, and then left the hotel.

When O’Donnell was alone, he thought to himself: “I suppose if Lavirotte recovers, we may be able to hush the matter up. But if he dies—great heavens, what a thought!—

there will be a trial, and how will it go with me? I can prove nothing. I know nothing of how he came by this hurt. It will seem to anyone that we fought. It may seem that I was the aggressor. That I attacked him foully, and killed him ruthlessly while he was trying to defend his life. This is a terrible thought. It will drive me mad. Why, they may bring in a verdict of MURDER! They may hang me. Innocent men have been hanged before. Hang me on the very day that I was to have been married. What can I do for you, Nellie? What better can I do for you, Nellie, than die here?"

## CHAPTER VI.

THE next morning after the encounter on the road, all nature seemed refreshed, rehabilitated. The grass sparkled green with rain, the trees glittered in the sun, the air was pure and cool and sweet. Not a cloud darkened the sky. The whole world seemed full of joy and lusty health. One felt that something had occurred, some burden had been withdrawn from the earth, some portentous influence had retired.

Early bathers were hurrying towards the strand before Dr. O'Malley was stirring. When he awoke, the events of the previous night at once flashed into his mind. "Here's



a nice pickle," he thought. "Mysterious event—two men half-killed—both deserve to be killed, no doubt—eminent medical man called in—eminent medical man treats with the utmost skill—no confidence beyond confidence in his professional ability reposed in medical man—medical man entrusted with a Mission—Mission to console Beauty—infernal nuisance!—infernal nuisance, Tom O'Malley! I suppose there's nothing for it but to keep your word, and do half-an-hour's clever lying to this Miracle."

Between seven and eight o'clock the post was delivered in Glengowra.

"I'll wait till I see if there are any letters," said O'Malley to himself. "My appointment as Surgeon-General to the Forces may at this moment be the property of Her Majesty's Postmaster-General. I suppose if they do offer I must accept. Oh, dear! why didn't I think of making love to this Paragon? Poor

girl! It's no laughing matter for her this morning."

The post brought no letter for Dr. O'Malley, and as soon as the carrier had gone by, O'Malley put on his hat and set out for the house where Mrs. Creagh lived.

The postman was still in the street, and O'Malley gradually overtook him. At the rate the two men walked, allowing for time lost by the postman in delivering letters, the doctor would arrive at Mrs. Creagh's half-an-hour before the other. He found all stirring at the widow's place.

He had some doubt as to whether he should tell the mother first; but, on second consideration, he decided that Miss Creagh was entitled to the earliest news. He knocked at the door and was shown in. When Nellie entered the room she was dressed in white, the same dress she had worn that day he threw away the flowers and used words instead. Of all

the things looking fresh to the doctor's eyes that morning she seemed freshest. The bloom of perfect health was on her cheek, the light of perfect health was in her eye. She wore no ornament but her engaged ring and a rose in her hair.

"It's a pity," thought the little doctor, "that such a glorious creature as that should ever be troubled or grow old. What are kings and princes and all the powers and vanities of the world—what are all your Roman triumphs—compared to such amazing perfection?"

"A very early call," he said, "but I was up and I thought I'd look in. It would be impertinence to ask you how you are. I had a little business this way, and, as I said, I thought I'd look in."

The girl smiled. Her face remained unclouded.

"I know a call at this hour is not con-

venient or considerate, but I had a little thing to say to you."

"Something to say to me?" she said, with a look of gentle surprise. What could he have to say to her so early? She smiled faintly as though to encourage him; for now it struck her suddenly that what he had to say was not pleasant.

"The fact is, a little accident has occurred. I am a doctor, and know what I am saying. It is the merest scratch. You must not be alarmed. There now, sit still."

She had risen. All the bloom had now left her cheeks. A little still lingered at her lips. "You may tell me, Dr. O'Malley. I know he is not dead. I can see that by your face. Where is he?"

"Sit down. My dear young lady, you are going too fast. Dead! Why he's nearly as well as ever, and will be better than ever in a short time."

"Tell me all," she said. "May I go to him?"

"I haven't seen him this morning yet. Better wait till after breakfast."

"Where is he?"

"At Maher's."

"Dr. O'Malley, tell me exactly what has happened."

Something strained and rigid in her voice warned him that he must be quick if he meant to be merciful. "There was a stupid quarrel of some kind," he said, "and he got a slight wound—I assure you not in the least dangerous."

"With whom was the quarrel?"

"With Mr. Lavirotte."

"Mr. Lavirotte—Mr. Lavirotte! Did Mr. Lavirotte stab Eugene?"

"Yes, a mere nothing, though, a pin-hole. You will be angry with me for causing you any uneasiness when you know how slight it is."

“Why did Laviotte stab Eugene?”

“Because there was some foolish quarrel; I really don't know what. It's ridiculous to call the thing a stab; it's a mere scratch.”

“Is Laviotte hurt?”

“Yes; he is more hurt than O'Donnell. But putting the two hurts together, I assure you they're hardly worth talking of.”

The straightforward calmness of this girl was terrifying him. He was becoming fidgety, and not well able to gauge the value of the words he used.

“You know the cause of the quarrel?”

“Upon my honour I do not.”

“You know the cause of the quarrel. We need not mention it now. You see how calm I am. You must tell me the truth. Are you sure *neither* of these men will die?”

“I—I——”

“Mind, *sure*?”

"I am as sure as man can be O'Donnell will not die."

"But Laviotte will?"

"Laviotte may. It is impossible to say. I left him unconscious. He is unconscious still."

"I will not wait till after breakfast. I will go now. Stay a moment—I must tell mother, and get my hat; I will not keep you long."

As the girl left the room, the postman turned into that street. As she came into the room again, with her hat and gloves on, the postman walked up the little garden and handed in a letter. It bore the Dublin postmark, and was addressed to "Miss Creagh." Her mother, who was in the hall, took the letter into the room where the doctor and the girl were standing. "A letter for you, Nellie," the mother said.

"Will you keep it until you come back? It's from Ruth, I think."

"I'll take it with me," said the girl, and put the letter in her pocket. "Ruth," she said, in the same calm, unmoved voice, "is one of my pupils in Dublin. Now, Dr. O'Malley, if you are ready, let us go."

"She will not let me go with her," said the mother, in a tone of concern.

"I am better alone, mother," said the girl, and she turned and moved out of the room.

O'Malley followed her, and in a few minutes, which were passed in silence, they were at the hotel. O'Malley went upstairs to the room where O'Donnell lay.

"All going on well?" he said briskly to the patient. He went through the ordinary formalities. "Yes," he said, "all going on well. Very little fever. We shall have you all right in time for your wedding. You can



go away then and pick up strength, amuse yourself for a month or two."

"Have you seen her?" asked O'Donnell.  
"How did she take it?"

"Yes, I've seen her. She took it like an angel, like a heroine. I gave her leave to come and see you later."

"When do you think she'll be here?" asked the invalid.

"Oh, at some reasonable time. Young ladies don't visit at eight o'clock in the morning. You'll promise to keep yourself quiet when she does come?"

"Very quiet. Did she get a great shock?"

"Not so much a shock as a turn. Will you promise to be very quiet if I let her come soon? The fact is, O'Donnell, she will be here in a few minutes. There, of course, you guessed it; she is here already; she came with me. Now I'll go down, and she may

come up and see you, but you must not talk too much."

While the brisk little doctor was preparing O'Donnell for the visit of Nellie, the latter took out her letter and began to read it. Suddenly her face, which had been pallid ever since she heard the bad news, flushed, and she uttered an exclamation of dismay. "Such news," she cried, "and on this morning!" The letter ran as follows:

"My dear Nellie, I told you I would write you if there was any news. There is news, and very bad news, I am sorry to say. Papa came home in the middle of the day quite unexpectedly, and told mamma that all was over and we were ruined. I don't think it's known in town yet, but mother told me everyone would know it to-morrow. This is dreadful. Mamma and papa are awfully cut up. I write you this news at once, because, of course, dear, you are greatly interested in Mr. O'Donnell,

and his father is in some way mixed up with papa. I hope it will not hurt your *friend*." Then followed an account of some family matters, and the signature, "Ruth Vernon."

"I must not say a word of this to Eugene now," she thought. "He told me his father was very largely mixed up with Mr. Vernon. Of course I could not tell Eugene. I feared there was something wrong there, but I was bound in honour, and by my promise to Ruth, not to speak of it to anybody living. When I met him first on the beach, and Lavirotte introduced us, I was greatly struck by the coincidence that I should meet him, knowing as I did, that he might suffer greatly if anything happened to Mr. Vernon."

In a few minutes O'Malley came down and said she might go up. "He is getting on well," he said cheerfully, "and there's nothing in the world to fear."

That day went over quietly at Glengowra. Early in the afternoon Laviotte recovered consciousness. The police had got scent of the affair, and were making inquiries.

In the afternoon news reached the village that the great banking-house of Vernon and Son had failed for an enormous sum. It was kept from O'Donnell, but Laviotte heard it. "I must telegraph to London," he said. "Someone must write the telegram for me." The body of the message ran as follows :

"Vernon and Son bankrupt. See about your money at once. Am ill, and cannot go over."

When the telegram reached London it was delivered to a young woman of twenty years of age, who grew pale and flushed, and flushed and pale again, upon reading it. "What?" she cried, "Dominique ill. My darling suffering

and I not near him. I will leave to-night for Glengowra. Stop ! I must get money somewhere first. I have none, not a penny—the attorney told me he would have my money to-day. These people are pressing me for the rent. They are hateful creatures. I will go to the solicitor at once. I can pay what I owe then, and go over by to-night's mail."

She put on her things. The landlady was waiting in the hall. The landlady would feel obliged if Miss Harrington would give her the rent *now*, before going out. She really must insist on being paid now. She could not afford to give six weeks' credit, and she had had an application for the rooms. There were six guineas for the rooms and ten guineas for meat and drink, sixteen in all. Would Miss Harrington pay or leave, please ?

Miss Harrington would pay upon her return from her solicitor.

Oh, that old story about the solicitor !

People could not go on believing this old tale for ever. If Miss Harrington did not bring the money with her, she need not come back that day. Whatever she had upstairs would not pay half the bill, and indeed Miss Harrington ought not to go out with her watch and chain and leave struggling people so pressed for money.

The tears were now falling fast from the young girl's eyes. She was alone, friendless, in London. She had not a coin in her possession. She took off her watch and chain and laid them silently upon the hall table. She made a great effort at self-control, and said, pointing to the third finger of her left hand: "I have nothing else of value but this. Shall I leave it also? It was given to me by one very dear to me."

"It would help," said the landlady, "and I have my husband and children to think of."

Then she took off the ring—his ring—the

ring he had given her to wear until he gave her a simpler one with a holier meaning. She put the ring down on the table beside the watch and chain. Then her heart hardened against this woman, and no more tears came, and bowing slightly she said good-bye and left the place, meaning never to return.

She went to her solicitor's. He was away. Would his managing clerk do?

Yes, anyone who could give her information about her affairs.

The managing clerk had bad news—it was terrible news indeed. They had not been able to get the money from Vernon and Son. Vernon and Son were bankrupts according to to-day's reports, and all her money was gone.

Would there be none of it coming to her?

No. Owing to the way in which the money was lent there was no chance of getting any back.

Then she left the office, homeless, friendless, penniless. She had not even a shilling to telegraph to him—her Dominique. Whither should she go? Where should she turn?

To the river.



## CHAPTER VII.

DORA HARRINGTON found herself in the Strand, in the full light of a summer's day, homeless, friendless, penniless. Her last chance was gone. Vernon and Son, who held all the money she owned in the world, had failed, and failed in such a way as to leave no prospect of her ever getting a penny out of the five thousand pounds confided to them.

She was an orphan, and had spent much of her life out of these kingdoms. She knew nothing of business. Mr. Kempston, her solicitor, had been appointed her guardian, with full discretionary powers as to the

disposal of her property. She and he had not agreed too well, for she had wished to marry Lavirotte, and he had opposed her desires. She had wished to get control of her property, and had been denied, and the relations between her guardian and herself had of late been most straitened. Only for his good-humour in the matter there would have been an open rupture. He had politely, but firmly, refused to agree to either of her suggestions. She had impulsively, warmly protested against what she called his interference in her affairs.

Two years ago she had first met Lavirotte. She was then a young girl of eighteen. She met him at a concert of amateurs in London. He made love to her, and she fell in love with him. He proposed, and she had accepted. Then he explained his position.

He was not rich enough to marry. She told him she had a little money—she thought

about five thousand pounds. He laughed, and said that might be enough for one, but was no good for two, adding, bitterly, that he did not know how he could possibly advance himself in the world. He was then the only photographer in the small town or village of Glengowra, and the chance of his getting into any better way of making money did not seem likely to him.

“You sing very well,” she said. “You have a good voice, and you know music. Have you never thought of music as a profession?”

He had never thought of music as a profession until then. He was only twenty-two at the time. He knew very well he could not afford to go to Italy or even to the Conservatoire. He had no money laid by, nor was there any likelihood of his having money to lay by.

Then she suggested that he should borrow

some of her. To this he would not listen. If he were not able to attain a competency himself, he would never put it in the power of fools to say that he had climbed into a profession aided by anyone, least of all by his future wife.

After much talk and expostulation on her side, he was induced to agree to accept the loan of a few hundred pounds. Then it was that she went to her solicitor and guardian, told him she had made up her mind with regard to her future, and that the man of her choice was a Frenchman, by name Laviotte, and by profession a photographer in the town of Glengowra, in Ireland.

The solicitor was considerably surprised, and said he should not be able to come to any decision for a few days. Mr. Kempston was a bachelor, and had no means of taking care of his ward beyond the ordinary appliances of his profession. He could not invite her to his

bachelor home, and her income was not sufficiently large to warrant him in appointing a lady companion or chaperon of any kind ; all he could do in her interest was to find her moderately comfortable lodgings, and see that she regularly received the dividends on her shares in the banking concern of Vernon and Son.

Mr. Kempston was the sole surviving executor and trustee to her father's will, and in the exercise of his discretion he had invested her five thousand pounds in shares of Vernon and Son, Unlimited. She knew nothing whatever of business, and Mr. Kempston's managing clerk, in alluding to her money as lent to the bankrupt firm, was simply using popular language, and attorning to the ignorance of business inherent in the female mind. He knew very well that she, being a shareholder, had not only lost all the money she owned, but was liable to the very last

shred of her possessions for any further demands which might be made upon her with regard to this failure. He had felt himself fully justified in telling her she had lost all her fortune, that she was, in fact, a pauper ; but he had not felt himself called upon to explain that later on she would appear in the light of a defaulter.

Dora Harrington, now an outcast from home, and fortune, and friends, found herself in the great city of London absolutely without resources of any kind. Her money was gone, she knew. Her guardian and she were no more than business correspondents. Her lover's position in Glengowra forbade the hope he might ever be able to marry her, and she had within herself no art or knowledge by which she could hope to earn a living.

What was now to be done ? Where should she eat that evening ? Where should she sleep that night ?

Nowhere!

Where was nowhere?

The river.

And yet to be only twenty years of age, and beautiful, as she had been told, and still driven to the river by the mere fact of a few pounds this way or that, seemed terribly hard to one who knew she had done no harm.

If he were but near her! But he was poor and hurt, and it would only help his pain if he knew that she had been cruelly hurt by fortune. And yet, how could she live? Where could she go? Whither should she turn? The world of life seemed closed against her, and only the portals of death seemed fit for her escape.

To be so young, to love and be loved, and yet to have no avenue before one but that leading to the ghastly tomb, appeared hard indeed.

It is true that of late her Dominique had

seemed less eager in his haste to write to her, less fervent in his expressions, less tender in his regard. But this may have been owing to his sense of inability to face the future with her maintenance added to the charges upon his slender means. There was no prospect of his advancing himself to any substantial result. He had written her, saying he had devoted much of his time lately to the cultivation of his voice and the art of music. That, in fact, he was now leading tenor in the choir of the church. But he was careful to explain to her that this meant no financial advancement, and that in fact it was to him the source of some small losses of time and money. Besides, there was no one in Glengowra who knew much of music save the two organists, and the knowledge of even these was not of much use to anyone who had to think purely of voice-culture as opposed to instrumentalism.



In the present there seemed no germ of hope. The future was a blank, or worse than a blank. And to-day, now, this hour, was an intolerable burden which could not be endured.

And yet how was she to remove it? How was she to get from under this crushing sense of ruin? It was plain to her that the ardour of his affection was cooling, not owing to any indifference on his part to herself, but owing to the fact that he recognised, even with the prospect of her five thousand pounds a year hence, the impossibility of their union.

Now that five thousand pounds had vanished wholly, and the possibility of their marriage had been reduced to an almost certain negative.

What should she do? What was there to be done? The answer to this question did not admit of any delay. Between this mo-

ment and the moment of absolute want was but an hour, two hours, three hours, a condition which must arise absolutely by sunset. She could do nothing. It was possible to walk about the streets, no doubt, until death overtook her; but why should she wait for death. If Death were coming, why should she not go and meet him half-way?

Still it was hard to die. To die now in the full summer, when one was young and full of health, although bankrupt in hope, when the sun was bright, and the air was clear, and great London at its most beautiful. To die now without even the chance of communicating with him, Dominique?

He, too, was ill, dying perhaps. Yes, he was dying. His affection towards her seemed waning. He had no worldly prospect, and her little fortune was wholly gone. If death would only come in some pleasant shape she would greet it gladly; but the notion of wooing

death was cold and repugnant. The waters of the river were chill, and full of noises and foul contagion. People had not willed themselves into life; why should they not be allowed to will themselves out of it?

For hours she walked along the crowded streets of London. Moment by moment faintness and the sense of dereliction grew upon her. The active troubles of the morning had passed away, and were now succeeded by a dull numbing sense of hopelessness. She had no longer the energy to protest against her fate. She moved through the crowded ways without hope, without fear, without anticipation, without retrospection. She had the dull, dead sense of being an impertinence in life, nothing more. She wished that life were done with her. Life was now a tyrannical taskmaster, who obliged her to walk on endlessly, with no goal in view; who compelled her to pass among this

infinite multitude, debarred of all sympathy with them, of all participation in their joys.

At length the sun fell, and minute by minute the busy streets grew stiller. The great human tide of London was ebbing to the cool and leafy suburbs.

She found herself in a neighbourhood which she had never before trodden. She had passed St. Paul's, going east, and then turned down some dark, deserted way, until she found the air growing cooler and the place stiller.

"I must be near the Thames," she thought. "Fate is directing my steps. The future is a blank. Let the present be death."

She was now beginning to feel faint from physical exhaustion. She had sought that solitary way because she found she could no longer walk steadily. She had eaten nothing that day.

It was now close to midnight. This place

seemed so sequestered, so far away from the feet of men, that she felt she might lie down and sleep until the uprousing of the great city. But she thought :

“If I sleep here, I shall wake here, and what good will that be to me? If I sleep in the river, I shall wake—Elsewhere.”

She found herself under a square tower. She leaned against the wall, irresolute or faint. She moaned, but uttered no word. In a few moments she placed her hand against the wall and pushed herself from it, as though repelling a final entreaty. Then she staggered down the street and into a narrow laneway that led to the river.

## CHAPTER VIII.

It was midnight, and as silent as the grave. The quality of the silence was peculiar; for although no sound stirred the air close at hand, there was, beyond the limits at which the ear could detect individual sounds, from minute to minute a tone of deep murmur, which would have been like the noises of a distant sea but that it was pulseless.

Overhead hung an impenetrable cloud of darkness. There was no moon, no star, no light from the north. Looking right overhead, one saw nothing, absolutely nothing. The eyes of the living were, when turned towards the sky, as useless as the eyes of the

dead. But casting the eyes down, one could see roofs, and towers, and spires, and domes, dim and ghastly in the veiled underlight, glowing upward from the streets of a vast city.

No wind stirred. The broad river, with its radial gleams of light shooting towards the lamps, moved no more than an inland lake into which no stream whispers, from which no stream hurries forth. It was high water.

Looking down from the giddy height, no moving forms could be seen, a policeman had passed under a little while ago, and none would pass again for a little while more, except some thief on his way to plunder the living, or some poor, troubled, outcast brother on his way to the river to join the silent confraternity of the dead.

The leads were slippery with dew and green slime; the battlements were clammy and cold.

To look straight down one should raise himself slightly on the parapet of the embrasure. Then he saw a perpendicular chasm, two hundred feet deep on his side, a hundred feet deep on the side opposite. On the four sides of the leads were four such chasms, and in all of them lay the dark heavy gloom of that summer night, save where once in each cleft there burned a fiery point—the gas-lamp—to scare the unlawful and light the harmless through the silent ways—part of the mighty city-labyrinth lying below.

On the leads it was impossible to see anything. From parapet to parapet, from battlement to battlement, from embrasure to embrasure was to the eye a purposeless void. It was impossible to guide the movements except by the sense of touch; for although when one gazed downward on the roofs below, the chequered glow hanging above the street gave the eye purpose, when one drew back



from the parapet all was dark, the dull reflection of the city's light did not reach upward far enough to illumine the open space within the four walls.

Yet there was life and motion on those leads, in that darkness set in the solitude. A heavy, slow tread could be heard now and then, and now and then groans, and now and then words of protest and anger, bitter reproach, tremulous entreaty, fierce invective, and passionate lamentation. The voice was high and quavering like that of a woman overwrought, or a man overwrought or broken down by sorrows or by years. Then these sounds would cease, the footsteps, the groans, the words, and the silence of a blind cave in which no water dripped, and which harboured only the whispering and confounded echoes of a far-off stream, fell upon the place and filled out the measure of its isolation.

The slow measured tread of the policeman

broke in once more upon the listening ear, gained, reached its height, and was lost in the still ocean of darkness.

"I am accursed. Nothing favours me. All is against me. No wind! No rain! Wind and rain are my only friends. They are the only things which can now be of service to me, and for a week there has been neither."

The querulous, complaining voice was hushed. The shuffling feet moved rapidly across the leads. Then all was still once more. Stop! what is that? In the street below an echo to the wail above? No words can be heard, yet the purport of the voice is unmistakable.

The listener catches the import of those tones. He has heard similar sounds before.

"It is a woman," he says. "Men never whine here, and at this hour, going that way! In a quarter of an hour it will be all

over with her. A quarter of an hour! How long have I been here, slaving and toiling day and night, carrying away bit by bit what lies between me and affluence, and to think that in a quarter of an hour, from one bell of the clock of St. Paul's to the next, I might find an end to all my hopes, and fears, and labours, and lie at peace, as far as this world is. Hark! Why does she pause beneath? She cannot suspect, no one can suspect why I am here. All the dreary months of terror and sweat that I have spent here never drew from me one word, one sign which could give a clue."

The figure of a woman in the street below could be seen dimly on the other side of the way. She leaned against the wall, irresolute or faint. She moaned, but uttered no word. In a few moments she placed her hand against the wall and pushed herself from it as though repelling a final entreaty. Then she stag-

gered down the street and into a narrow laneway that led to the river.

"She is gone," said the voice in the darkness. "She is taking all her troubles with her to the greasy Thames. Why should not I, too, take all my troubles thither and end my care? A quarter past! Before the half-hour strikes, I and my secret, my great secret, might be gone for ever. Has she a secret, or is it only the poor want of bread and shelter, or is it unkindness, a hope destroyed, love outraged, affection slighted? Why should I inquire?"

From the narrow lane into which she had struck, a moan reached the listener's ears.

"She is in no great haste. This is not the despair of sudden ruin to life or hopes. Her misfortunes have crawled gradually upon her, with palsied feet and blows that maddened because they never ceased—not brave blows that drive one furious and to swift

despair. *I am the victim of this slow despair. Why should I drag out wearily, toilfully, in terrors that I make myself, the end of my old life ?*"

Again the woman groaned.

"Curse her ! Can she not go ? Who minds a woman more or less in the world ? The world is overstocked with them. No one is here to pity her. Why should she pity herself ? It would be a mercy to her to take her and lead her to the brink and push her in. Why, it would shorten all her pains. Curse her, there she groans again. No rain, no wind to help me, and only these groans for a goad to my despair. I will not hear them any longer. My own troubles are more than I can bear. Stay ! That is a lucky thought. I'll go down and tell her that the police are here, coming for her, and that she has not a moment to spare."

Again the woman's voice was heard.

"Forty years ago I could not take that voice so coldly, for all women were then to me the sisters of one; my sweetheart then, my wife, the mother of my children, now the tenant of the neglected grave miles and miles and miles away out there. Now all the children dwell in houses such as hers, and with her and them went out the life of me. I never cared to see the younger brood, for when my wife died it seemed to me that all who loved me, or whom I loved, came to me but to die, and so I steeled my heart against the new brood and slunk into myself, shut myself out from them and all the world, and took to lonely ways and solitude until I came to this."

For a while no sound reached the ear. At last there was a sob, not a woman's voice this time, but a man's.

"I hardened my heart against them, and

the world seemed to have hardened its heart against me. I am lonely and alone. There is no wind. There is no rain. There has been no wind or rain for weeks. For weeks I have been ready for either, and either will not come. Twice a day the river gains its full height, asking me to go with it out of my loneliness and my toil. Heaven will not send rain or wind to me. Heaven took my wife and happiness. Heaven sent the river to me. I have often thought of going. I cannot leave this place and live. I cannot stay in this place and live. Hark! I hear the first rippling of the river as it turns its footsteps towards the sea. What sound is that? She! Five minutes by the clock and all will be over with her. What? Striking half-past? Idiot that I am! Why should I burden myself with the despairs of another hour? I shall await the five minutes. For I should not care to be—disturbed. I should not care

to hear or see—anything of her. I am alone. I would go alone. I am in no humour for company. I am too big with my own griefs to care for those of others. I have feasted on sorrow until I have grown enormous, colossal, distended beyond human shape. Let my great secret die with me. Let me die alone. I am a giant in the land of woes. I am Giant Despair. She has closed the door behind her ere this. It is time for me to knock. I have no farewells to take. That is lucky. Not one heart in all London will beat one beat more or one beat less when I am gone.”

The feet trod the leads more vigorously than before. Then a step was heard descending the ladder.



## CHAPTER IX.

ST. PRISCA'S Tower stands alone in Porter Street, hard by the Thames, on the Middlesex side, and between Blackfriars Bridge and the Tower of London. It is all that now remains, all that remained on that night, of St. Prisca's Church. City improvements had swept away the main portion of the building, and on that silent summer night, when that man descended from the leads of the tower, this square structure rose up, a mighty isolated shaft, two hundred feet above the pavement of the street and the three small alleys which skirted its other sides.

In a short time after the voice ceased

finally on the roof, the figure of a man—Lionel Crawford—emerged from the gloomy darkness of the tower door, and stood in the light of the lamp.

Lionel Crawford was a man of sixty-five years of age, bent in the shoulders, and a little feeble in the legs. His walk was shuffling and uncertain, but still he seemed capable of great physical effort, if he chose to exert himself. His face was dark, and of a leathery colour. His eyes were dark, almost black, and protruded a little. His mouth was large, the lips full and heavy, the teeth still white and sound. The forehead was broad and high, and strongly marked with wrinkles, perpendicular and horizontal, dividing the forehead into four parts. Two smooth, wide, arch-shaped spaces stood up over the brows, and above them, slightly retreating, two smooth convex expanses. His hands were large, ill-made, knotty. In the lamp-light he took off

the soft felt hat he was wearing and disclosed a head bald to the apex, but having still around its lower edges and behind a thick covering of curly black hair. He was dressed in clothes which had been those of a gentleman at one time, but were now nothing more than the meanest device for covering the body and keeping it warm.

When Lionel Crawford had stood in the light of the lamp for a short time he drew himself up to his full height, inflated his lungs, and looked around defiantly. To judge by his face, defiance was an attitude familiar to his mind. But here was no one to see it, only the callous walls, the imperturbable night.

From the top of the tower he had marked the way taken by the woman. It was a continuation of the narrow alley into which the door of the tower opened. It led directly to the river, and in order to reach it from where

he stood it was necessary to cross Porter Street.

Once more the measured tread of the policeman was heard approaching. Lionel Crawford drew himself back into the deep doorway of the tower, and waited until the footsteps had passed the end of the alley and died away in the distance. Then he issued forth, turned to his left out of the doorway, crossed Porter Street with a brisk step, and plunged into the narrow way the woman had taken. Before he had gone ten yards the place became as dark as a vault; it was impossible to see a yard ahead, and only that he knew the place well, he could not have proceeded without feeling his way.

No ordinary man in an ordinary state of mind would, at such an hour, venture into that narrow, dark, forbidding way. But Lionel Crawford was an exceptional man, in an abnormal state of mind.

From the time he left the top of the tower until he obliterated himself in the darkness, his mind had been in a dull lethargic state. He fully intended putting an end to his existence that night. That was his only thought. He should walk down to the end of that narrow lane. At the end of that narrow lane was a wharf, and from the edge of this wharf to the surface of the water he had only a few feet to fall. Then all would be as good as over, for he could not swim, and it was not likely—the chance was one to a thousand—there would be anyone there to attempt a rescue.

Notwithstanding his familiarity with the place, he abated his pace a little and walked more with his old shuffling gait than when he had the light to guide him. All at once he stumbled and fell.

“What is this!” he cried, as he tried

to rise. His feet were entangled in something soft, which yielded this way and that, and for a while hindered him from rising. At last he rose, and leaning against the wall for breath, rubbed the sweat from his forehead. His faculties were numbed, and for a few moments he scarcely knew where he was or whither he had been going. The first thing he clearly recalled was that he had entered Winter Lane. Then he realised the fact that in the dark he had tripped over something now lying at his feet.

“But,” he thought, “what can be here? What can be lying here at such an hour? I was down here to-day and the place was clear. Now I remember I had intended going to the river. I had calculated on no one being at hand to prevent me. Fool that I was! How could I have forgotten the watchman of the wharf. I dared not throw into

the river the stones I get up with so much labour, lest he might hear me and hand me over to the police."

He now was standing over what had tripped him. He stooped down and felt carefully, slowly, around him. His hand touched a face—a smooth, beardless face—the hat of a woman.

What was this? A woman lying prostrate here, and at such an hour. He seized the form by the shoulders, and shook it.

"What are you doing here?" he said.  
"Wake up. What are you doing here?"

There was a slight motion in the form of the woman. She made an effort to rise. He helped her.

"What do you mean, woman," he said angrily, "by going to sleep in such a place at such a time, and tripping up an old man who is on his way to—his Friend?"

The woman answered in a feeble voice :

"I don't remember exactly how it was. I did not go to sleep. I think I must have fainted."

"But this is no place for you to be, woman, at this hour of night."

"I did not mean to stop here," she said. "I meant to go to—the River."

"*You* meant to go to the River—to my friend, the River? So did *I*. You faint and trip me up. That may be an omen of good luck to both of us. Come, although there is neither rain nor wind I feel in better humour now. Are you hungry?"

"I have no friend—no money."

"Are you young?"

"Twenty years of age."

"Too young to think of death. Come with me. It cannot have been a mere accident that brought us two together. Come with me, my child. I am old enough to be



your grandfather. Stop!" he cried, suddenly.

"What is that? Did you notice anything?"

"No," answered the woman feebly.

"Do you know it *rains*?" he said. The tone of despondency at once left his voice, and was succeeded by one of exultation. "I told you," he said, "we did not meet for nothing. I have been praying and cursing for rain. I meet you, and here the rain is. Twenty," he said, "and tired of life! Nay, nay; that will not do. You have a sweetheart? I was young myself once."

"Yes."

"And he is false?"

"No, no. He is ill and poor."

"I am alone, old, childless, friendless. You have stopped me on my way to the river, and brought the rain. One day, at any hour, I may be rich. If I live to win my gold, I shall share with you and your lad. It would be a piteous thing that a sweetheart of twenty

should die. Come with me ; cheer up and come with me." He drew her arm through his and led her in the direction of the tower. "Sweetheart," he said, "it makes one young again to think of saving love. I cannot see your face or figure ; but all are sweethearts at twenty. What is his name ?"

"He is French," said she.

"French ! What is his name ?"

"Dominique Lavirotte."

"Dominique Lavirotte !"

## CHAPTER X.

WHEN Lavirotte returned to consciousness, the day after the encounter on the road, he seemed to have but a hazy notion of what had occurred, and yet to have known that caution was necessary. He found one of the women of the house seated in the room. He asked her had he been hurt, and how he had been hurt.

She said: "I don't exactly know. Mr. O'Donnell and you came here together. He is hurt, too."

"Much?"

"His shoulder is cut, I believe. They tell me he is not very bad. Maybe you know something about it?"

"My head is hurt," he said, "and I cannot remember well. There is no danger he will die, is there?"

"The doctor says no, but that he'll want good caring."

Then for a long time Laviotte was silent.

"What does Eugene say about it?" he asked at length. "Does he know how he was hurt or how I was hurt?"

"They did not tell me. I do not know."

"Will you take my compliments to Mr. O'Donnell, and ask him if he remembers what happened?"

"I don't think I'd get much for my trouble if I did. The police have been here already trying to find out about the matter, and Mr. O'Donnell refused to tell them anything."

"Refused to tell them anything! Dear Eugene! dearest Eugene. Most loyal of friends! I always loved him."

Then there was another long interval of silence.

“Who is with my dear friend Eugene?”

“I don’t know who is with him now. His father and mother were here early in the day. They have had news I am told. Some great man in Dublin is closed.”

“Some great man in Dublin. Did you hear his name?”

“No ; but they say it will be very bad for old Mr. O’Donnell.”

“Will you ask Mr. Maher to come this way?”

When the landlord entered, he said: “Who is the great man that has failed in Dublin?”

“Mr. Vernon.”

“Ah, Mr. Vernon. So I guessed. This will be bad for the poor O’Donnells.”

“There are other things bad for the poor O’Donnells as well,” said the landlord, bitterly.

"I am sincerely sorry for my dear friends. You know, Mr. Maher, they are the dearest friends I have on earth."

"Ah!" cried the other sarcastically.

"I must telegraph to London. Someone must write the telegram for me."

"I will," said the landlord, grudgingly.

"You are always so kind," said the invalid; "always so kind! You Irish are, I believe, the kindest-hearted race in all the world."

"And sometimes we get nice pay for our pains."

Then the telegram to Dora Harrington was written.

"Have Mr. and Mrs. O'Donnell left, or are they with their son yet?"

"Mr. O'Donnell is gone back to Rathclare. Mrs. O'Donnell is with Mr. Eugene. It's a sorrowful business."

"And nobody else?"

"Eh?"

"And there is nobody else with Mr. Eugene O'Donnell?"

"I say it's a sorrowful business."

"Dreadful. I am profoundly sorry."

"Eh?"

"A sorrowful business, I say, about the failure of the bank."

"Eh?"

"My dear Maher, you are growing deaf. You ought to see to this matter at once. Dr. O'Malley is a very clever man. You ought to mention the matter to him."

"That'll do, now. You're bad, and I don't want to say anything to you. But my ears are wide enough to hear what they say."

"Who are *they* that say, and what do *they* say?"

"*They* say that you stabbed Mr. Eugene O'Donnell, one of the pleasantest gentlemen that ever put a foot in Glengowra."

"But he himself denies it."

"He doesn't."

"When the police came he would not tell them anything."

"More fool he ! But there, there—I won't say any more. This is against Dr. O'Malley's orders. He said you were not to be allowed to speak, or excite yourself. You may say what you like now, Mr. Laviotte ; I'll say no more. I'll obey Dr. O'Malley."

"One more question and I have done. Is there anyone but Mrs. O'Donnell with Eugene ?"

"Yes, Miss Creagh."

"Thanks ; I am very much obliged to you. I will trouble you no more now."

When the servant returned to the room, he said to her : "What a kind man your master is. Notwithstanding his belief that I made an attack upon Mr. Eugene O'Donnell, he was good enough to write a telegram for



me, and to tell me some of the town gossip. I hear that Miss Creagh is in the sick room. I want you to do me a great favour, if you please. Take my compliments to Miss Creagh, and say I would feel greatly obliged if she would favour me with a few moments' conversation."

The attendant drew herself up. "It's not likely," she said, "Miss Creagh would come near you. When I was coming up, Mr. Maher told me you were not to talk or excite yourself."

"Do as I tell you, woman," he said sharply, "or I will get up out of this bed and dash myself out of the window, and you will be the cause of my death, and have to answer for it."

The servant was cowed. She rose timidly and left the room. Almost immediately the door reopened, and Ellen Creagh entered, followed by the servant. Her pallor was now

gone, and although her cheeks and lips had not the depth of bloom usually on them, she looked nearly her own self.

She smiled faintly as she approached the bed on which Lavirotte lay. "You wish to speak to me, and I have come."

"Yes," he said, "I wish to speak to you. May it be with you alone?" He looked at the servant in the doorway.

She motioned the servant to withdraw, and then came close to the bed.

"Miss Creagh," he said, "they tell me he will get better. They tell me he has given no account of what took place last night to—the police. Has he told you what occurred?"

"He has," she said; "to me, and to me only. He said to his mother that the secret was one concerning three only."

"He and I being two, and you the third?"

"Yes," she said. "What do you wish me to do?"

"First of all to forgive me, if you can."

"I forgive you freely. He says you must have been mad."

"I was," he said, "stark, raving mad. I was not responsible for what I did. I am in the most grievous despair about the matter."

"He is sorry he injured you ; but it was in self-defence."

"*He* injure me ! Not he. What put that into his mind ? *I* injured him. I will not pain you by telling you what I did. It was not I did it ; it was a maniac, a demon. You must tell him quickly he did not injure me. In self-defence, in trying to guard himself against an accursed madman, he sought to throw me. We both fell close to a rock at the end of the cove road, and my head struck the rock. You will tell him this, will you not, Miss Creagh ? It will relieve his mind. It will relieve the mind of my dear friend, my dearest Eugene."

“He will be glad to hear he did not do it, but sorry to know you are so much hurt. He does not blame you at all. He says his great anxiety to be up is that he may come to you and shake your hand.”

The tears stood in Lavirotte’s eyes.

“God bless my boy,” he cried. “God bless my boy, Eugene. I am not worthy to know him. I am not worthy to know you. I am not worthy to live. I am not fit to die. I am an outcast from earth, from heaven, and from hell.”

“Just before I left him to come and see you”—the young girl’s colour heightened slightly—“I took his hand to say good-bye to him, even for this little time,” she smiled. “I took his hand in mine; in this hand,” holding out her right. “He said to me, ‘You will tell Lavirotte I am sorry I cannot shake his hand.’”

She stretched out her right hand to his

right hand lying on the counterpane. "If I take your hand now, it will be the nearest thing to touching his."

"Yes," said Lavirotte eagerly, "it will be touching a hand that is dearer to him than his own." He took the warm white hand in his, and raised it to his lips reverentially. "Now, the favour I have to ask of you is this: it far exceeds in magnitude the one I first thought of asking you."

"What is it?" she said, briskly. "I am sure I shall be able to grant it."

"You will ask him to let me be his best man at your wedding."

Again the young girl coloured.

"I will, if you wish it, and I am sure he will consent."

"Will you ask him, for then I shall have something to say to you?"

She left the room and returned in a few minutes.

“Nothing will give him greater pleasure. He is delighted at the notion. He would have asked you only——” Here she paused.

“I understand,” he said. “Only for what occurred once between you and me. I am told there is bad news, the worst news, of Vernon and Son to-day. Do you believe in fate?”

“I do not believe in fate.”

“I do,” he said, “implicitly. I believe it was fated that you and I should never be more than friends, and that you and he should be everything to one another. And now fate appears to me in a new aspect. There is a chance—a very slender one, I admit—nay, a wonderful, foolish chance that I may one day come into some money, not in the ordinary way of succession, but by a romantic event. I will be perfectly frank with you. I will make a confession to you which I have made to no one else here. It will damage me more in your opinion than it could in the

opinion of anyone else living. When I said those words to you that day in the boat, I was engaged to be married to someone now in London."

The girl started. "You—you were not serious that day, you know. You only meant to pay me a compliment."

"No, no," the wounded man cried quickly. "I meant ten thousand times more than I said. But there—let us drop that subject for ever. I am only too glad to think of it no more. I offered you my hand when it was not mine to give, and when you promised to give yours to another I tried to kill him. No man could have been baser or more unworthy than I. And yet there is a use in my baseness, for has it not given him an opportunity of forgiving me—fine-hearted gentleman as he is—and you of showing me that you are the noblest as well as the most beautiful woman alive?"

“You are too hard upon yourself, and too generous to—us,” the girl said, colouring. “I must not stay if you will talk in this fashion.”

“Yes, stay by all means,” he said, “for I have not done speaking yet. I will say no more on that topic. I have another secret to tell you. It will take some time. It is not unpleasant. It is, in fact, connected with the only property I own, and the possible consequence of my owning it. It is situated in London. It is only the tower of an old church—St. Prisca’s, in Porter Street, by the Thames. I own that tower. It was built many hundred years ago. The rest of the church has been pulled down——”

“Here is Dr. O’Malley,” said the girl.

“Miss Creagh,” cried the doctor in astonishment. “You here!”



## CHAPTER XI.

MR. WILLIAM VERNON was a venerable, benevolent-looking man of seventy years of age. His hair was white, his figure slightly stooped, his manner gentle, kindly, plausible.

Until the crash came, everyone believed he was the most prosperous man in the city of Dublin. He had three fine private houses—one in Dublin, a seaside residence at Bray, and a castle in Monaghan. His income was believed to be somewhere between twenty and forty thousand a year, and it was believed that he lived well within it. His savings were said to be enormous, and the general conviction was that he could retire in splendour on his money, invested at home and abroad.

Now all was confusion and dismay among those connected with him in business. So great was the excitement, two policemen had to be told off to guard the door of the bank. Men and women, too, who were depositors or shareholders, refused to believe the news, and came down to the bank to see with their own eyes confirmation of the report. There, sure enough, were the massive oak, iron-studded doors closed in their faces, never again to be opened.

As the hours rolled on, the depth and breadth of the calamity increased steadily. People who were supposed to have had nothing whatever to do with the bank divulged, in the excitement of the moment, the secret that they were shareholders or depositors. The credit of the whole city was shaken. Who could be safe when the great house of Vernon and Son had collapsed?

Before nightfall three other large houses

had suspended payment. They had gone down into the vortex. Then it began to be realised that not only had the shareholders lost all their money invested in shares, but that every man who, as principal or trustee, held even one of these shares, was liable to the last shilling he had in the world.

It had over and over again been suggested by outside shareholders that the business should be formed into a limited company. William Vernon always shook his head at this, and said that if you limit the responsibility you limit the enterprise, and so reduce the profits. They were paying twelve per cent. on capital—did they want to cut down the earnings to eight? He assured them it would cripple the whole concern seriously, and he, for one, would retire from any responsibility if such a course were urged upon him. It had been suggested to him, in advocacy of this scheme, that limiting the company would

enormously diminish the risk of the shareholders in case disaster should overtake the bank. He had replied to this with a shrug of his shoulders, a smile of half pity, half amusement, and said: "If you have any fear, why not sell out? If you have any confidence in my word of honour, you need have no occasion for fear."

Mr. William Vernon had the reputation of unblemished honour. He was, moreover, an exceedingly pious man, belonging to one of the most rigid forms of dissent. No one questioned his word; no one sold out; and now all were ruined.

Mr. Vernon had married late in life. Mrs. Vernon was twenty-five years his junior. His elder daughter, Ruth, was now fifteen years of age; his younger, Miriam, twelve. He had but these two children.

Mrs. Vernon was a large, florid, comely woman, who, twenty years ago, when she was

married, had been considered a beauty. She was now no longer beautiful. She was a well-favoured matron of forty-five, with an exaggerated notion of the importance of her husband, her children, and herself. He was courteous, insinuating, with a dash of infallibility. She was dignified, not to say haughty, with a great notion of the high position she occupied in the social world. She was not harsh or cantankerous with servants, but she never for one moment allowed them to think they were anything but servants—that is to say, beings of an immeasurably inferior order.

During the time Miss Creagh had been in Mrs. Vernon's house as resident governess to her two daughters, the mistress had shown the governess respect in the form of conscious condescension. She had never for a moment allowed anyone to slight Nellie, and even she herself had never slighted her. But,

then, she never was by any means genial or cordial, or anything but rigidly polite; and rigid politeness is the perfection of rudeness.

Nellie had not, however, been unhappy in that house. She had conceived a great respect for Mr. Vernon, and had grown to love the two children. Ruth was her favourite. The elder girl was flaxen-haired, blue-eyed, fair and pink, with a tendency to sentimental poetry and enthusiasm, and with a most excellent heart. Miriam, on the other hand, was a brunette, brown-haired, brown-eyed, vivacious, invincibly loquacious, with a thorough contempt for everything that was not material to comfort, and with a heart which beat so fast for its own excitements, that it rarely had time to concern itself with anything else.

Mr. Vernon had that summer postponed their going to their house at Bray a month beyond the usual time. The crash had not

come upon him unexpectedly. He and a few others knew for some time that it could not be avoided, but it might be put off. He was loath to leave Dublin; and as his family never went to Bray without him, he thought it better they should not go now, as if they did it might cause talk. Bray is but half-an-hour or so from Dublin; but he did not like to sleep so far away from the bank, for now important telegrams were coming at all hours of the day and night, and the delay of an hour might hasten the disaster.

The immediate cause of the ruin was the failure of a trader in Belfast, who owed the bank considerable sums of money, and had been encouraged by Mr. Vernon to play a risky business on the chance of making large profits. In fact, the relation between the Belfast and Dublin houses would not bear the light of day, and the large profits which, it was said, enabled the Belfast house to

pay a fancy price for money, had all been taken out of the capital lent by the bank.

The Belfast house had, some years ago, an extraordinary stroke of luck. It legitimately doubled its income in a year. It depended almost wholly on its export trade. It sent most of its goods to India and the Colonies. During the good year it could not manufacture as quickly as it could sell. Then it borrowed in order to increase its manufacturing powers. It built and set up new machinery. It exported more than it had orders for and stored abroad. This went on for some years, the output being in excess of the demands of the prosperous year, the sales less than before the prosperous year. The result of this could be seen—bankruptcy.

Nothing else was talked of in Dublin all that day, all that night, in the clubs, in the



hotels, between the acts at the theatre, in the private houses, in the tramcars, in the streets. No class seemed to be unaffected by the gigantic catastrophe. Widows and orphans were ruined, trustees rendered penniless. Commercial fabrics which had cost generations to build up, were now tottering to the fall.

All this dreadful day Mr. Vernon sat in his study, a large back room on the first floor of his Fitzwilliam Square house. He now fully realised his own position. He had directly ruined hundreds, and indirectly, through them, thousands. For years the bank had practically been in a bankrupt state. For years the fact had been kept secret by means of false balance-sheets. For years the pious, bland William Vernon had been the author of a gigantic fraud.

What was coming now to him? An indictment? Imprisonment? Were a common

prison and common prison diet coming to him in his seventieth year? All this time that he had been issuing false balance-sheets he had lived in splendour. He had kept his three houses, his horses, his domestic servants, his gardeners, his grooms, his coachmen. He had given dinners which were the talk, the admiration, the envy of Dublin. His wines were the finest. He had a French cook; he had footmen of the shapeliest forms and politest manners. Was he about to have, instead of his three stately houses—the city jail? Instead of his dining-room—a prison cell? Instead of his courteous footman—a gruff turnkey? Instead of cliquot—gruel? Instead of respect, honour, reverence—contumely, scorn, and curses?

The present was bad enough. The future looked much worse. He did not allow himself to waste any of his energies in grieving for those who had lost through him. He said to himself:

"They speculated and lost. They only lost money. I have lost all the money I once had, all the reputation, and now in my old age it is not unlikely I may lose my liberty. I have done the best I could. Had I reduced my establishment, suspicion would have been aroused at once, and the blow would have come much sooner. If I had earlier exposed the position of the bank, ruin would have come then just as now. If after the first loss in Belfast I sanctioned wild, mad speculation, it was in the desperate hope of recovering what had already been sunken. What I did, I did for the best. O'Donnell will, of course, be the heaviest sufferer, but he has had his twelve per cent. for many years. I dare say he will not be able to save a penny out of his whole fortune. Neither shall I out of mine."

Just as he came to the end of these self-justification reflections, these comfortable

sophisms, Mrs. Vernon entered the room, dressed for going out.

"Going out, Jane?" he cried all in astonishment.

"Yes," she said. "The house is so dull, I thought I'd take the brougham and call upon the Lawlors."

"Take the *brougham*," he cried, "and call upon the Lawlors! Don't you know the Lawlors are shareholders in the bank, and that they, too, are ruined?"

"But," said Mrs. Vernon, drawing herself up, "the Lawlors were old friends of mine. I knew them before you did. We were children together. They will be glad to see me, although you have been unfortunate in business."

"Glad to see you! Woman, they would thrust you out of doors with curses. When people are ruined they do not pay much heed to friendship, nor are they over nice in

the way they express their anger. As to the brougham," he said, "I have been stupid not to tell you, but I cannot think of everything. We could never with decency use the brougham, or anything of the sort, again." He threw himself back in his chair and laughed harshly for a few seconds.

"I see nothing to laugh at in this disgrace and worry," said his wife, who thought herself the most injured person of all. "I am sure I am very sorry for you, William, when I consider the respectable position, the eminent position you held. I am sure you cannot say I was extravagant, or that I brought up the children extravagantly. You told me yesterday that my five thousand pounds are secured by the marriage settlement. Why should I lose my old friends any more than the money my father gave me when we were married?"

"Because," he said, laughing harshly again,

“you married what the world will agree to call a fraudulent scoundrel. When I laughed a moment ago at the thought of the brougham, the idea which occurred to me was—it is rather painful. Shall I tell you?”

“Yes, you had better tell me, I suppose. *Everything* is painful now.”

“Well,” he said, “I thought that the next member of the family likely to drive would be myself, and the next vehicle in which I was likely to drive would be a Black Maria.”

“Black Maria, William,” she said. “I do not understand you.”

“Black Maria, my dear,” he explained, “is slang for a prison van. What is the matter, Jane? You seem weak. Help, outside there, Mrs. Vernon has fainted.”

The door opened. A footman entered.

“If you please, sir, the brougham is at the door.”

The old man started and looked up,

became suddenly pallid. "What did you say, James?"

"I said, sir, that the brougham was at the door."

"Ha! ha! ha! As I live, James, I thought you said the Black Maria. Fetch Mrs. Vernon's maid instantly. The mistress has fainted."

## CHAPTER XII.

WHEN, on the night after the failure of Vernon and Son, Lionel Crawford heard from Dora Harrington the name of Dominique Lavirotte, and repeated it after her, he was filled with amazement. "This is the most extraordinary thing," he said, "that ever happened to me in all my life. Dominique Lavirotte," he repeated for the second time. "I am amazed !"

"Do you know him ?" the girl asked.

"Well ! Why, he owns the place I am taking you to. It isn't much of a place. It is only the tower of an old church. They are always talking of buying it from him and taking it down. But you see it isn't big



enough to give room for building a warehouse or store on the ground it occupies, and it is impossible to take in any other building with it. But come, sweetheart," he said; "when did you eat last?"

"I—I had some breakfast."

"But breakfast is a long way since. You are young, and must be hungry. Here is the door of the tower." He took out a large key, and having turned the lock, thrust the door into the darkness. "Now," he said, leading her in, "be very careful; there is a hole here. Stand where you are until I find the lantern and matches."

He groped about, and in a few seconds had lighted the candle in the lantern. Then he took the young girl by the hand, and said: "This way."

By the light of the lantern she could see that they were walking on two planks, which together were not more than eighteen inches

wide. Beyond the planks was a hole, the depth of which she could not guess.

"Don't be afraid," he said. "Keep close to the wall and you are all right."

The girl shuddered. She, who a few minutes ago was on her way to the river, now shrank from the notion of death. Had she not met someone who knew her lover, someone who knew Dominique, her darling Dominique? This was to get a new lease of life, a new interest in worldly things, a fresh-filled cup from the fountain of hope.

She clung closely to the wall, and followed the old man through the gloom. They reached a corner, and here found a ladder.

"Up this ladder," he said; adding, "What shall I call you? What is your name?"

"Dora," she said. "Dora Harrington."

"Then, Dora, my dear child," he said, "keep close to the wall on this ladder, too, for there is no hand-rail, as you see."

They mounted the ladder. It ran along two sides of the tower. Then they found themselves on the first loft. The head of the ladder was unprotected by any rail. Two other lofts they reached in a similar manner, she clinging closely to the wall.

"This is my sitting-room," he said, with a laugh. "It is not very wide or long, but it is lofty, airy, and, although there is not much furniture, and the little I have is the worse of the wear, it will have a great interest for you, for it belongs to him, Mr. Lavirotte. Sit down here, now, on this couch. The spring is not so good as it once was. You will have a cup of tea and some nice bread-and-butter. That little table over there is my kitchen. See," he said, "we do not take long to light the fire, and we shall have boiling water in a few minutes. Boiling water," he said, "and the prospect of a nice cup of tea is better for you, sweetheart, than

the cold Thames. The prospect of—of—ugh! Let us forget that unpleasant folly of ours.”

He had kindled the lamp in a small oil-stove, and set the kettle on the stove. “And now,” he said, “while the water is boiling you shall tell me as much as you please about yourself.”

She was very tired, and for the present the mere rest was food and drink to her. It was pleasant to sit there, half-tranced with fatigue, to sit upon this couch which belonged to him, in the presence of someone who knew him, and with the prospect of succour from a friendly hand.

The furniture in the loft was not, indeed, handsome. It never had been. When Lavirotte lived in London he had furnished a couple of rooms, and upon leaving them found that he could get little or nothing for the furniture. So he carted it away to St. Prisca's Tower in

Porter Street, and there it was when, at the request of Lionel Crawford, he let the tower to him.

In the loft where Dora Harrington now found herself there were three ordinary chairs, one arm-chair, a couch, and two tables, besides the "kitchen." The walls were rough, unplastered brick. The roof of the loft was unceiled. Under the table was a small piece of carpet.

"My own room," said the old man, "is above this, and this shall be yours for to-night, and as long as you wish after, until you get a better one, or until he comes for you."

"How can I thank you for your kindness? May I ask your name?"

"Lionel Crawford," said the old man. "I live in the room above this, because my business requires me to be near the roof by night."

"Your business requires you," she said,

"to be near the roof by night." By this time he had made the tea, and she had drunk a little, and begun to be refreshed. "Can it be you are an astronomer?"

"No, no," he said. "I am no astronomer, and yet all the matters of weather interest me greatly. The rain to-night may be worth a fortune to me."

"You are a farmer, perhaps," she said. "Or no, that cannot be; but you own land?"

"Not a rood. Although I say I am much interested in the weather, I am neither interested in growing anything, nor in meteorology beyond the winds and the rains. By day I get as far away from the sun as I can, as close to the rich centre of the earth as I may. By night I aspire, I seek the highest point I can reach, and there I worship the clouds and the winds that they may befriend me."

The old man was now sitting in the easy-chair, leaning forward, his eyes fixed on

vacancy. He had a weird, possessed expression. He seemed to be looking at things far off, and yet clearly within the power of his vision. He seemed like one in a dream, and yet his words were as consequential and coherent as the reasoning in Euclid. His might have been the head of an alchemist, or of some other man who dwelt with unascertained potentialities, with mystic symbols and orders and rites, with things transcending the ken of vulgar flesh, with subtleties of matter known to few, rare drugs, rich spices, the virtues of gems, the portents of earth and air, the mystic language of the stars, the music of the spheres.

"And when it is winter," asked the girl, "you wish, I suppose, for sunshine and calms?"

"No," he said. "Never. Always for rain and wind; wind and rain. Wind in the daytime, and rain by night, winter and summer; all the year round."

"And may I ask you," said the girl, timidly, "what you are?"

"When I met you this evening," he said, in the same tone as he had employed since he became abstracted, "I was Giant Despair."

"And now," she said, "what are you?"

"The rain and you have come," he said. "I am now the humble Disciple of Hope."

"And, sir, may I ask, have you no friends, no relatives?"

"None that I know of," he said. "All my children are, I think, dead. My wife is dead. My best friends are the dead."

"But surely, sir," she said, "there is among the living someone in whom you take an interest?"

"No; no one. I am a client of the dead. If any good ever comes to me in life it will be out of the buried past. I doubt if good will ever come. I am too old and spent. I was too old and spent when I began my labours



here. For years I had my great secret hidden in my breast. I nursed it, I fed it, I dreamed over it. For years I lived in this neighbourhood hoping some day or other to gain admission to this tower. I could not find out who owned it. It pays no rates or taxes. It is not registered in any name that I could ever find out. I had begun to think I should never get any nearer the goal, when one day as I was without the walls I saw a young man come up, thrust a key into the lock of the great door, and try in vain to move the rusty bolt. I watched him with consuming eagerness——”

“This was some time ago?”

“Years, two or three years. I drew up to the young man and said: “I fear, sir, it is a tougher job than you bargained for.” I offered to get him a locksmith, and in less than an hour we got in. The young man told me he had come from abroad——”

"What was the young man's name?" asked the girl.

"Dominique Lavirotte," said the old man, in the voice of a seer busy with things remote.

"My Dominique," she whispered; "my darling Dominique."

The old man went on without heeding the interruption. He had forgotten the connection between the girl and the man.

"The stranger told me," said old Crawford, "that although he had lived some time in England, he had now been for years abroad. This was all the property he had in the world, and he had never seen it before. He understood it was absolutely valueless, and he had merely come to see it now out of curiosity. 'For,' he said, 'is it not strange that in the City of London, where the rent of land is six shillings a square foot, I should own some for which I cannot get a penny the

square yard? I wish I could get someone to buy it,' he said.

" 'You must not think of selling it,' said I. 'I have been waiting here years in the hope of meeting you.' "

" 'Why?' he cried in astonishment. 'Do you want to buy?' "

" 'No,' I said. 'May I speak to you a while in private?' The locksmith was standing by. Then I took this handsome young man aside, and having made him swear he would not reveal the matter to anyone——" "

" 'What?' cried the girl, leaning forward eagerly.

" 'That is *my* secret," said the old man.

## CHAPTER XIII.

FOR a while Dora Harrington and Lionel Crawford were silent, he still with the look of an enraptured visionary on his face, she perplexed, wondering, disturbed.

What could this secret be which he, the man to whom she was engaged, never told her? One thing appeared plain to her, it was not a secret in which Dominique was directly concerned. It was the old man's secret, communicated by him to her lover. Yet it was not pleasant to think that Dominique, who seemed so candid, so outspoken, so open, should have something which he had concealed from her. The notion of a

secret was cold and dire. He had one : he might have many, as he had never even told her that he owned this queer tower, standing all alone in those dark, forbidding ways by the river.

Of late Dominique had not written to her as often or as affectionately as of old. True, he was not in good spirits about his worldly prospects. She had told him over and over again, when he asked her, that she would marry him on anything or nothing. Who or what was this old man, that he should be mixed up with Dominique's affairs long ago ; that he should have stood between her and the Thames to-night ? Was it possible this old man would tell her nothing more ? He had excited in her curiosity, vague fears. Would he do nothing to allay either ? Thus to be saved from the fate she intended for herself that night, to find in her protector a friend of his, and then to be confronted with a

mystery in which Dominique had a part, were, surely, enough things to make this night ever memorable.

“Mr. Crawford,” said the girl, “I can never forget the service and the kindness you have done me. Will you not do me an additional favour by telling me something of this secret which affects him?”

The girl had finished the tea and eaten some bread by this time.

“Take off your hat,” he said. “Lean back and rest yourself, and I will tell you something more.

“Ten years ago I was as lonely a man as I am now. All my family had drifted away from me. Most of them were dead. Some of them had married, I know not whom. My studies always occupied me, and after the death of my wife, whom I tenderly loved, I went deeper than ever into my books.

“Most of my children left me when they

were young, and went abroad. I had six children in all. From time to time one left me until all were gone, and ten years ago I had no more clue to the whereabouts of any than I have to-day, except that I knew some were in the grave.

“I was then better off than I am now; but I have still enough to live on, and to buy a book now and then. My books are all above. All my interest lies in one direction, all my books treat of the same subject—the history of the past, the history of the men and women and places of old times. My interest in the present closed with the death of my wife. But, somehow or other, since the time of which I speak, ten years ago, I think I have grown less exclusively devoted to my favourite pursuit than I was at the time of the dispersion of my family.

“I do not often speak to anyone except to those of whom I want to buy; but I cannot

help thinking there is a link between you and me, for are you not betrothed to him who owns this tower, and has not this tower for ten years been the chief object of my attention, of my solicitude? Was it not to him I first told the secret which I had carried with me eight years? Is he not now the only person who knows my secret, and when the time comes for divulging that secret to a few, are not you to be the first to hear it?

“ Well, ten years ago I was, as I have said, as much alone in the world as now. I had always a notion that something was to be discovered in connection with this Porter Street. Here and there in my books there were vague hints, misty statements, that in this street had taken place something of the greatest importance, something which might in the greatest degree excite the interest of an archæologist. But you see, the street is long, a mile long, I dare say, and to search



every inch of a street a mile long would be altogether out of the question.

“At that time I was living close by. There were certain old book-shops, between Long-acre and the Strand, which I visited almost daily. Here, one evening, I picked up a battered old volume for a few pence. It was dated 1625. It turned out to be of no great interest; but on bringing it home, I was struck by two facts—first, that the book, although battered, was complete; and, second, it contained some memoranda in manuscript, one bearing these startling words: ‘A great fire has broken out, and is spreading towards us. There is not a minute to be lost. What can be removed is to be removed to Kensington. *What cannot be removed is to be left where it now is.*’

“This memorandum was dated: ‘Daybreak, 3rd September, 1666.’

“It was, of course, in the spelling of the

period. Underneath this memorandum appeared the words and figures: 'Speght's Chaucer, page 17, lines 17 to 27.'

"I have told you already that I had something like a hint of what I wished to find out. I am not free to tell you why the first of these memoranda interested me profoundly, and shone before me like a revelation. I seemed to be on the point of a great discovery, a discovery of the utmost importance to me, a discovery which had fascinated my imagination for years.

"I am free to tell you why the second memorandum filled me with despair. It was essential that the book referred to in memorandum number two should be found. The clue in my possession was absolutely of no value without a copy of Chaucer. Before giving way to despair, I had looked over the passage in the reference. I had read over twenty lines above and below without being

able to find the slightest hint to a clue. It was evident from this fact that the text of the poet threw no light on the subject, and that the intention of the man who had written the memorandum was that reference should be made, not only to the particular edition specified, but to an individual copy of that edition.

“My despair was all the greater because I seemed to be half-way towards success. I could not rest indoors. I wandered forth into the streets without any definite object in view. To the average student of history, the discovery of this volume containing a reference to the Great Fire, written at the very moment it was raging, would have been inestimable; but to one who was in quest of a particular object, and had come within a measurable distance of it, without being able to touch it, this book was a curse.

“Before I knew where I was I found myself

standing in front of the identical shop where I had bought the volume. I went listlessly over all the other books exposed for sale in front of the window. I saw nothing corresponding to the object of my search.

“Then suddenly a thought struck me. The book I had bought was valueless. A copy of this particular edition of Chaucer would fetch money. I went inside, and asked the man if he had any other books belonging to the lot among which the one I had purchased was.

“He told me he had several; that he bought the lot in an old, tumble-down house in Wych Street, where the books had lain for ever so long, and that they were reputed to be salvage from the Great Fire.

“Imagine my excitement, my delight, when I found a copy of Speght’s edition, and upon opening the volume, and referring to the passage indicated, I discovered writing on the

margin. This writing was briefer than that in the former volume. It was simply: 'St. Prisca's Tower. See Mentor on Hawking, 1625.' This was the book I had bought a short time previously. The chain was now complete. The area of inquiry was absolutely limited to the ground upon which this tower now stands. In the Great Fire of Charles's reign the church and tower of St. Prisca had been attacked by the flames, and the church had been completely destroyed. The lower portion of the tower, however, was found by Wren to be sufficiently good for the purposes of rebuilding, and so, about ten feet above the ground of these walls belong to the old tower. Later on the modern church was pulled down; but for some reason, I cannot find out, the tower has never been interfered with since.

"These books had evidently been carried

away from the region of the fire to the fields where Kensington now stands ; and then, when the fire was subdued, carried back to Wych Street, where they had remained until the bookseller who sold them to me had bought them about ten years ago."

Here the old man finished his narrative, which had been delivered in a monotonous tone. His eyes were fixed, staring intently before him, and he seemed to be wholly oblivious of the fact that Dora was listening to him. He was not, however, unmindful of her presence ; for no sooner had he concluded, than he looked at her directly and said : " I have told you all I can ; all I may. Dominique Lavirotte and I are the only persons who know the rest, and you know more than anyone else in the world except him and me. You must be tired now. I never told this story before, and, in all likelihood, I never shall again."

It was now close to two o'clock in the morning. To the opening words of the old man Dora had given little attention. In fact the events of that night, until she had begun to feel refreshed by the rest and tea, had left a very weak impression on her mind, and she would have found it hard to say whether the occurrences had been real or figments of her brain. As the story advanced, she had felt a more lively interest in it, and towards the end she found that she was listening with awakened curiosity.

The old man said : " I will bring you down a rug, and then you must try and get a little sleep. I shall have to work a couple of hours yet in this welcome rain."

He brought the rug and spread it over her, and then emerged once more upon the roof.

## CHAPTER XIV.

WHEN Crawford reached the roof it was still dark. The intense darkness of a few hours ago had passed away, and it was possible on the roof to see dimly the figure of the old man, the parapet, and the lead.

Towards each of the four corners of the lead the roof sloped gently, and in each corner was a shoot leading to a pipe. In each of the four corners, but so placed as not to obstruct the shoot wholly, and yet to impinge upon it, lay a heap of something.

To each of those heaps the old man went in succession, moving the heaps so as to make them impinge a little more upon the



gutter. When this was done he put down his spade, resting it against the parapet, and leaned out of one of the embrasures.

All was still as death below. The darkest hour is the hour before the dawn; the most silent hour is the hour before the re-awakening.

It was raining heavily now. The old man did not heed the rain. His eyes were turned vacantly towards the east. He was watching for the dawn, not with eyes busily occupied on the dim outline of the huge stores and warehouses before him. His gaze was directed to the east simply because he knew that in the east the sun would rise, and that as the light grew broad, and the top of the tower was overpeered by lofty buildings on higher ground, he must, soon after daylight, intermit his work on the roof if he would keep his secret.

When the gray had moved up in the east,

the old man went his rounds once more, spade in hand. The rain still continued.

When he had finished, he paused and leaned once more at the embrasure he had formerly occupied. "I always," he thought, "take care to keep the clay heaps about the same size. Rain is very good, no doubt. It works off more than wind, except the wind is very high. The worst of the rain is that when the clay gets soaked through and cakes, I have to take it down to dry the minute the weather gets fine, and bring up more sieved earth, for the wind would have no effect on the hardened clay. At first I thought of putting all I excavated on the lofts; but I found them so old, and weak and shaky, that I durst not trust them beyond a little each. There, I have put all the large stones too big to carry out and leave quietly here and there. There are tons and tons of stones upon the lofts, and I am afraid

the floors will bear very little more. It would never do to overload the lofts and have the labour of my two years all undone. The rain has stopped. It will help me no more. Heaven send the wind. Here is the day."

It was now bright enough to see that the roof of the tower was covered all over with a coating of thin mud, washed into streaks here and there by the rain. In each corner lay a heap of clay. There were a basket and a large pail also on the roof. The old man now began to work energetically. He filled the pail with the mud, and in four journeys down to the first loft, succeeded in removing all that had been on the roof. Then he carried up four large baskets of finely-sifted clay, and put one basket in each corner near the shoots, so that those who had seen the roof of the tower from afar off the previous day would notice very little, if any, difference, even with the aid of a glass; for the nearest

building that overlooked the tower was a mile distant.

It was now broad daylight, and as the old man stood, his work completed, all round him rose the muffled murmurs of awaking day. He was wet through, but he did not care for this. He was used to it. The rain and the wind were his great friends, and he hailed their advent with delight.

It was plain what his object was. By day he worked in the base of the tower, at which the ground stood now twelve feet higher than at the time of the Great Fire, and twelve feet below this was the foundation of the tower.

For two years Lionel Crawford had slaved in the daylight digging down towards the foundation. He had a pickaxe and shovel and sieve. When he had dug up some earth and rubbish, he sifted this on a piece of old carpet and carried the siftings up to the top

loft, there to dry and become friable for the purpose of being got rid of on the roof. Everything that would not go through the sieve, he carried out with him, and dropped here and there as occasion offered, and the larger stones, which he never put on the sieve at all, he carried up to the lofts.

When he had wind instead of rain he stood on the tower in the dark, and when all was quiet, threw away the sifted earth to leeward, handful by handful. So that although he might thus in a night get rid of several hundred pounds weight of earth, no trace whatever of it appeared below the tower. When he was not helped by rain or wind he could not dispose of more than fifty or sixty pounds weight a night, without drawing attention to his operations. This quantity he got rid of by throwing handful after handful out of the embrasure all round the tower.

When he found himself on the loft where

he slept he took off his wet clothes, hung them up, and then lay down and slept.

It was late in the forenoon when he awoke. He dressed himself and went down to what may be called the sitting-room. Here he found Dora awake. "If it would amuse you, child," he said, "you may light the fire and make the tea. It may be a novelty to you, and it will surely be a novelty to me if you do."

Dora arose with alacrity and busied herself about the simple preparations for breakfast.

"It is a long time," said he, "since I had anyone—man, woman, or child—at a meal with me. Sometimes I go out and have my dinner or supper or breakfast in the poor eating-houses around here; but that is not often. I have learned to shift for myself as well as Robinson Crusoe did in his time."

When the breakfast was ready, Dora said: "I am sure you will forgive me, but the

excitement and confusion of last night have made me forget your name. Yet I remember that when you mentioned it, it seemed familiar to me."

"Lionel Crawford, my dear ; Lionel Crawford is my name."

"Crawford," she said, musingly resting her chin upon her hand. "I do not know how I could have forgotten that name, for Crawford was my mother's name before her marriage. It is not a very uncommon name in England, is it?"

"Not very," he said. "There are several families of the name in London alone."

They were now sitting at breakfast. No contrast could be much stronger than that between the young, soft, gentle, beautiful girl and the leather-hued, gnarled-browed old man. The bright sunlight fell through two long, narrow windows high up in the thick walls of the tower. It tinged the white

hand of the young girl lying listlessly on the table. It lit up from behind the rich curve of her cheek. It touched with gleaming, grave bronze the outline of her dark hair. The old man sat at the other side of the small table, looking with abstracted eyes at the partly illumined head of the young girl opposite.

"Ay," said the old man, "Crawford is not an uncommon name. There were several of us brothers when I was young. I was the only one that married, and I believe all my children are dead by this time. Their mother was sickly. She was everything to me while she was alive. No, Crawford is not an uncommon name."

"We used not to consider it a common name in Canada," the girl said.

The sunlight was gradually encroaching upon the mass of dark hair.

"Ah," he said, still with the abstracted air, "you were in Canada. One of my daughters



when she was young, a child of fourteen or fifteen, went to the United States."

"How strange," said Dora, shifting her position, and bringing all her head under the influence of the summer sunlight.

"No," he said, "not very strange. A great lot of people from these parts go to the United States, and, as I tell you, Crawford is not an uncommon name."

"What I meant," said the girl, with a somewhat puzzled look on her face, "was that it is strange your daughter, whose name was Crawford, should have gone to the United States when young. My mother went to the United States when young. She married there and then moved up to Canada."

"And you tell me your name is Harrington, Dora Harrington? My girl's name was Dora, too, and I heard she married a man named Harrington. What was your mother's Christian name?"

“Dora was her name,” said the girl, rising. “What do you think, sir, of all this?” The girl was now standing, so that from crown to heel the full sunlight shone upon her.

“It is extremely strange,” said he, still in his absent-minded way, “for I heard that my daughter moved up after her marriage.” Suddenly the old man’s eyes fixed themselves upon the illuminated figure of the girl. “I had not a good look at you before, child, and my eyes are dim with overmuch study. Yes! As heaven hears me, there is a look of my dead wife about you, child. Did they ever tell you you were like your mother? Do you remember your mother?”

“I remember her very little, sir. I was very young when she died. They told me I was not like her.”

“Ay, ay. That is all in favour of my hopes, my child, for Dora was not like my wife, and you are. Marvellously like! I seem to feel

the coil of forty years falling away from me." His eyes once more took the abstracted, far-away look of the lions. "Forty years ago," he said, "I was young and blithe, strong-limbed, and not repulsive as I am now. I wooed my Dora then, not in smoky London, but amid the green fields, and when the primroses were fresh with the early spring weather, and all the air was sweet with moist dews and fresh songs of birds. The leaves were all unsheathed, and each pulse of the wind brought a new perfume of the season. My Dora!"

"And you think me like her?" said the girl. "Oh, if it should be, sir!"

Suddenly the old man lost his abstracted look. He rose and stretched out his arms towards her, looking keenly at her the while. "You are she," he cried. "You are my Dora, my dead darling's grand-daughter. For her own daughter, whose child you are, was like me, all said."

"Oh, sir," cried the girl, "it is too much happiness for me to believe this true."

"I want some happiness now, my child," said he, "and no happiness greater than this could come to me, for I am tired of loneliness. Come to me, Dora."

The illuminated figure of the girl moved, passed out of the sunlight into the gloom of the room—into the gloom of the old man's arms.

## CHAPTER XV.

THE police of Glengowra were very inquisitive about the affair of that night. The town was exceedingly quiet, as a rule, and the fact that two well-dressed men had been engaged at midnight in a deadly encounter was unique and fascinating to the police mind. There was no doubt in the town or village, for it was indifferently called either, that the two men had fought, and that jealousy was at the bottom of the encounter. But both O'Donnell and Lavirotte held impregnable silence on the matter. Neither would make any statement. Lavirotte said they might ask O'Donnell, and O'Donnell said they

might ask Laviotte ; and it was known that no matter what may have occurred the previous night, the friendship of the men was now re-established.

This last fact was gall and wormwood to the police. It was sheerly the loss to them of a golden opportunity. To think that the biggest crime which had been committed for years in the town should not be made the subject of a magisterial inquiry, was heart-breaking. What was the good of having crimes and policemen cheek by jowl, if they were not to come into contact ?

A policeman lounged all day about the door of Maher's hotel, affecting to take an interest in the cars and carts passing by, and in the warm baths opposite, and to be supremely unconscious of the existence of Maher's. Nothing came of this.

Supposing each man should say his hurt was the result of an accident, there would be

no evidence to prove the contrary, and the police would only get into trouble and be laughed at if they stirred in the affair.

A fussy and blustering Justice of the Peace made it his business to call at the hotel, see Maher, and impress upon him the absolute necessity of doing something.

Dr. O'Malley absolutely forbade any "justices of the peace, policemen, or such carrion," entering either of the sick rooms.

He said to the magistrate: "Don't you bother about this affair. I promise you, on the word of a man of honour, to let you know if either of the men is in danger of death, so that a deposition may be taken; and I promise you my word, as a man of the world, that if anyone goes poking his nose into this affair, one or both of these young men will have something unpleasant to say to that nose when they get about."

This speech made the worthy magistrate

extremely wroth. He stamped and fumed for a while, and muttered something about puppies, and left the hotel in dudgeon.

Still later in the day the sub-inspector of the district, who was a friend of O'Malley's, and happened, by a miracle in which few will believe, to be a man of gentlemanly instincts and manners—called at O'Malley's house, spoke of the weather, the regatta, the price of beasts at the last horse fair, the desirability of building a pier for the fishing-boats in the cove, the hideous inconveniences of not being able to get ice in Glengowra in such roasting weather, the interesting case at the last Quarter Sessions, and finally, he said: "By-the-way, O'Malley, if you do know anything about what occurred last night on the Cove Road, and if you can do so without any breach of good faith, tell me what you know?"

"I don't know all about it," said O'Malley,



briskly ; "and what I do know I am bound to keep to myself. The part of the case about which I am game to speak is the medical aspect of it, and of that I am free to tell you there is no cause to fear either of the men will die. Now, that is all you want to know, because you're a good sort of fellow ; you're not more than a thousand years old yourself. Boys will be boys. Have a cigar."

Thus the young sub-inspector left O'Malley's house scarcely any wiser than he came. In the phrase, "Boys will be boys," O'Malley had conveyed to him an unmistakable impression that the theory of the fight was the correct one, and at the same time he recognised the skilful way in which O'Malley avoided any breach of confidence.

Directly opposite Maher's hotel were the warm baths, and a little to the right of these a shop, famous in the history of Glengowra,

and called by the pretentious name of the Confectionery Hall.

This title was ludicrously out of proportion with the appearance of the place. The "Hall," that is, the place open to the general public, was not more than twelve by fifteen feet. Here were displayed on a counter, presided over by a thin-featured maiden lady of long ago ascertained years, cakes of various kinds and sorts and ages, sweetmeats of universal dustiness and stickiness, ginger-beer, lemonade, and bottled Guinness and Bass. Sherry might, too, be obtained here in genteel quantities out of a cut-glass decanter, but the inhabitants of Glengowra had a national antipathy to the spirit known as sherry and when they wanted anything stronger than Bass or Guinness, they asked for whisky.

Now, the great feature of the Confectionery Hall, as opposed in principle to a mere public-

house, was that whisky could not be obtained at the counter. If a man wanted that form of mundane consolation, he was obliged to enter an inner penetralia, where not only could he have the "wine of the country," but an easy-chair to sit in and tobacco for his perturbed mind.

Towards the close of the evening of the day following the occurrence on the Cove Road, two young men were seated in this cave of nicotine discussing the event of the day, nay, of the year. Both were out from Rathclare for the cool evening by the sea, and in order to enjoy the most perfect coolness of the sea, they had retired to this back room, which was heavier to the senses and less open to the air than the stuffiest back slum of Rathclare.

Both had of course heard the great Glogowra news, and the great Dublin news of the day. It happened that one of these young men was in the employment of the State—to

wit, the Post Office, and the other in that of a public company—to wit, the railway.

“I can’t make it out,” said the Railway, “how it is that Laviotte should have fought O’Donnell about Nellie Creagh, because a fellow told me that a good while ago—a couple of years, I think—when Laviotte was over in London, he had made it all right with some other girl there.”

“I don’t like Laviotte, and I never did,” said the Post Office; “but this I am sure of—that he had some great friend in London, and that his friend was not a man. Of course I don’t wish this mentioned, and I tell you it in confidence. I remember his coming over here. We make up the bags from Glengowra at Rathclare, and when he came here first, and I met him and knew his writing, I saw a letter from him to a Miss Somebody (I will not tell you her name) in London, and this letter went two or three times a week.”

"Who was she?" inquired the others, inquisitively.

"I won't tell. I have already told you more than I should. You must not mention the matter to anyone. I know you so long, old fellow, I am sure I may rely on you."

"Well," said the other, "I don't want to seem prying. In all likelihood I shall never see Lavirotte or O'Donnell again. I am off next week."

"I am very sorry to lose you; but you're sure to come back to see the old ground shortly."

"I don't think I shall," said the other, carelessly. "It costs a lot for the mere travelling, and you know none of my people live here about. Anyway, when I get to London, supposing I am curious, which I am not, I can find out all about it; for I know an artist there who told me all about Lavirotte and the girl."

“How on earth did you find anything out about one man in such a big place as London?”

“My dear fellow, London is at once the biggest and the smallest place in the world. You have never been there?”

“No, never.”

“Well, you see, most of the nationalities and arts and professions live in districts, chiefly inhabited by themselves; and when they do not, they have clubs and other places of resort where they meet. So that, in the case of Laviotte, who was then thinking of being a figure-painter, but hadn't got the talent, there was nothing unlikely in his meeting other men of similar ambition, and so it was he came across there the artist I know, who happened to have a studio in the house I lodged in.”

“I have often looked at the map of London and wondered how it was anyone ever found

out where anyone else lived, even when he had the address. But I cannot understand how two friends can fall across one another accidentally in such a tremendously large place."

"You have never been in Dublin even, I believe?" said the Railway.

"No, never," said the other.

"Well, then, all I can tell you is, that if you walk from the College of Surgeons in Stephen's Green to the Post Office in Sackville Street three times a day, you will meet any stranger who may happen to be in the city."

For a little while both men were silent. Then the Post Office said:

"Well, as there is but a week between you and finding out all about this girl and Laviotte, I may as well tell you, in strict confidence, that her name is Miss Harrington. I forget her address. She

changed it often, but it did not seem a swell address to me. At first he wrote to her two or three times a week ; but of late his letters have not gone nearly so often, although some one in London, I suppose this Miss Harrington, wrote him twice a week regularly. Within the past two months I don't think he has written to her at all."

While this conversation was going on in the back parlour of the Confectionery Hall, the policeman, who had during the day devoted most of his attention to the vehicles passing in front of Maher's hotel and to the warm baths opposite, was relieved, and came over to the "Hall" for a small bottle of Guinness. It so happened that he had overheard, through the glass-door from the shop to the parlour, most of the conversation which had passed between the two friends.

He heard the two friends rise to leave. Before the handle of the door turned he was



out of the shop. In a few minutes he was back in the police-station.

"Well, any news?" said the sergeant, gloomily.

"I have heard something that may be useful," said the constable; and he detailed the conversation.

"And we have *found* something which may be useful," said the sergeant. "After a long search among the stones we came upon the knife Laviotte stabbed O'Donnell with. Here it is, with Laviotte's name and O'Donnell's blood upon it. It will go hard with us if we can't get Laviotte seven years on this alone."

## CHAPTER XVI.

IN the vast pile of buildings owned by James O'Donnell in Rathclare, by day several hundred men were employed, by night several score; for the steam mills were kept going day and night, and got no rest from year's end to year's end, save from twelve o'clock on Saturday night to six o'clock on Monday morning.

In the portion of the buildings devoted to milling operations most of the night-men were employed. In fact, so far as active employment was concerned, no men were engaged anywhere else in the place. There were, however, three watchmen for the other portions of

the building. One of these was outside in the yard fronting the river, another was on the ground-floor of the granaries, and it was the duty of the third to wander about the upper lofts and corridors.

Of late these men had been cautioned to observe greater vigilance. It was well known in Rathclare that the strong-room of James O'Donnell always contained a large sum of money, and sometimes a very large sum.

The man whose duty it was to examine the lofts passed along the corridor leading to the private office. All was right, so far. He always made it a habit to pause and listen at the door of the private room; for if an attempt was to be made upon the safe it should be from this place. The man went on in a leisurely way, ascended the next ladder he met, strolled along the lofts, ascended another ladder, sat down on a pile of empty sacks, and lit his pipe. Smoking was not, of

course, allowed, but then there was no one to see him.

When he had finished his pipe he ascended to the top loft and walked all round from one end of the building to the other, pausing now and then to listen at the head of a ladder or at a trap-door, or to look out of a window into the deserted street below. This took a long time, for there was no need of haste. It was an understood thing among the watchmen that each should speak to the other two about once an hour. Thus it would be known each hour that all was well throughout the building.

The watchman now began to descend. He went down more rapidly than he came up. It was quite dark, and the silence was unbroken save by the noise of the machinery and the swirl of the river as it swept past the wharf and quays and ships below, and whispered among the chains and ropes.

The three men generally met in fine

weather such as this on the wharf. It was pleasant to the two men, whose business lay indoors, to breathe for a few moments the cool air by the river. From the wharf no portion of the offices could be seen. They looked into the great quadrangle round which the granaries were built.

When the three men had stood and interchanged a few words they separated, each of the two going in his own direction, the third man remaining on the wharf. The man whose duty lay on the upper floors passed into the large quadrangle, round which the granaries stood. At first he noticed nothing remarkable; but when his eyes fell on the windows of James O'Donnell's office he started visibly, and uttered an exclamation of surprise under his breath.

The windows were full of light!

What should he do? What could this mean?

He had, of course, heard of the misfortunes which had fallen upon his master's house that day, but he made no connection between that fact and this extraordinary appearance. The warning against possible burglars was uppermost in his mind. Although he was nearly sure no one was then in that office for an honest purpose, still he resolved to proceed with the greatest caution, and give no unnecessary alarm.

He went out on the wharf and told the other man what he had seen. They both agreed that it would now be useless to try and overtake their other comrade, and that it would be best for the two of them to go to the office at once and see how matters stood there.

When they got indoors they took off their boots and proceeded cautiously to the foot of the stairs leading to the offices. Each carried a stout stick in his hand, and each man was

physically qualified to take care of himself in a scuffle.

They agreed it wouldn't do to get some more of the hands from the mill and proceed to the office as though they were sure of finding burglars there; for how could they tell that it was not the manager, or their employer himself, who had been obliged to come back owing to some urgent business?

They crept cautiously up the stairs and found themselves in the corridor, upon which the office door opened. Here all was dark and silent. Here they were confronted by a difficulty they had not anticipated. If it should be that the manager or the proprietor had come back at this unseasonable hour, the proper thing would be, of course, to knock at the door and ask if all were right.

But supposing there were burglars inside, knocking at the door would be simply to put them on their guard, and enable them to take

up a defensive or offensive position before the others could enter.

What was to be done?

As if by a common instinct, the two men retired to the further end of the passage to hold a brief council.

There was no means of escaping from that room except by this passage or the window. That window was not barred, and nothing could be easier than to get from it by a ladder or a rope. The first thing, therefore, to be ascertained was—did a ladder or a rope lead from that window to the ground of the quadrangle?

It was then agreed between the two that one of them should go down and examine the window from the outside, while the other waited in the passage here and watched the door until his fellow came back.

One of the men descended to the ground-floor, got out into the quadrangle, and looked



at the window, and the ground near the window. It was a dark night, and one could not see small objects distinctly. The man was not content with the evidence of his eyes alone. He stole over under the window, and placing his hand against the wall, walked forward and backward, ascertaining by touch that neither ladder nor rope connected the window with the yard. When he was satisfied on this point, he stole back to his companion and communicated the fact to him.

So far all was well. They had not now to think of any means of exit but the one before them. Still it was not easy to know what to do. Now it occurred to them for the first time that it was not at all consistent with the belief burglars were at work that the gas should be fully ablaze. Although there never had been an attempt to rob the mill on a large scale, or by violence, and the watchmen had no personal experience of burglars yet, it was their busi-

ness to know something about how that predatory tribe carry on their operations. It was not likely such men would attempt to force the door of a strong-room, made on the very best principles, with the light turned fully up. A dark lantern and silent matches were more the manner of the midnight thief than the great openness and defiance of gas.

It must surely be someone connected with the business. It was well they had not made a fuss about the matter, and now it would be well that they should delay no longer to prove their diligence by showing they had observed the unusual fact of the gas being burning.

Yes, there could be no longer any doubt their manager or employer was behind that door. There would be something absurd in the fact of two fine strapping fellows like them going up to that door in their vamps. It would show they had suspected someone

was there who had no right to be there, and this might give offence. It would be best for them to put on their boots before knocking ; besides, if they knocked as they were now, whoever was inside might think they had been prying.

When they reached the open air they put on their boots quickly. Then it occurred to them that, as they were now quite certain it was someone belonging to the business who was in the office, it would never do for two of them to appear at the door simultaneously. The duty of one man was to be on the wharf, and of the other to be on the lofts or in the passages, and if they had no suspicion wrong was going forward, why should the wharfman desert his post ?

They, therefore, agreed that the loftman alone should go back and prove his vigilance by knocking and saying that he had observed the light.

The two parted. The loftman, starting with his usual measured tread, crossed the quadrangle, entered the dark passages, ascended the stairs, and knocked at the door.

Two minutes after he rushed out upon the wharf, exclaiming in an undertone :

“Do you know who’s there?”

“No. Who?”

“No one. Come back with me and see if I am right. I can’t believe my eyes. There isn’t a soul there as far as I can see, in the office or in the passages.”

The two men went back to the passage, entered the private office, found the gas at full cock, and the place empty !

## CHAPTER XVII.

MR. O'DONNELL, towards the close of that unlucky day, found himself once more in his comfortable home at Rathclare. Within twenty-four hours, the life of his only son, the hope of his age, had been placed in danger; and all the earnings of a long and laborious life had been scattered to the winds by one tremendous blast of ill-fortune. He was not a communicative or demonstrative man. He took his pleasures soberly, gravely, and with little exterior show of delight. Outside his business, which was large and engrossing, he cared for little save his wife, and son, and home. He had few wants, and a

limited mind; but, like all men with few wants and a limited mind, he must have what he wanted, or life would not be worth living.

He did not sigh or burst into exclamations when the bad news reached him. He was reading a newspaper at the time. He put down his newspaper, and asked his managing man, who brought him the news, to repeat his words. Then, merely saying, "That is very bad news," he took down an account-book, and, having looked at how his affairs stood with the bank which had failed, put up the book in the safe, walked out of his office, and took the train to Glengowra, where his son lay hurt, and where his wife was already in attendance on the injured man.

Now, he was back once more in his home alone. His wife was to stay that night at Maher's hotel. In the present condition of his business affairs he did not feel himself justified in absenting himself from head-quarters.

Up to this he had very rarely been separated from his wife, even for a day. He seldom left his native town for more than a few hours, except when he went away for a week or so and took her with him.

He sat in the deserted dining-room all alone. He always carried in his coat-pocket a small memorandum-book, in which he had jotted down the net results of all his business transactions, so that at any moment, and in any place, he could see pretty well how he stood. He seated himself in a large easy-chair, and having pulled down the gasolier, took out this book, and sat silently consulting the pages for a long while.

By this time he had received full information from Dublin. He knew now the case of Vernon and Son was absolutely hopeless. He was going over his book, not in the hope of finding out anything cheerful about his own affairs, but just merely to convince himself

through his sight of what he was already convinced through his reason.

When he had reached the end of the written pages, and had made a few figures with his pencil and arrived at a total, he tore out the page on which he had made this last calculation, and then carefully and delicately tore the page into little bits.

He put down his pocket-book on the table at his elbow, and then sat for a long time arranging and re-arranging the fragments of the paper into various figures on the table at his side.

When it was about eleven o'clock, a servant came and asked him if he wanted anything.

No, he wanted nothing. They might all go to bed.

When the servant had retired, he re-began his work with the fragments of paper.

At twelve o'clock he seemed to have made up his mind that there was no good in trying



any longer to arrange the pieces in a satisfactory way. He pushed all the bits together, swept them into his hand, and placed them on a tray, on which were some glasses, which he had not used.

He took up the pocket-book again, and quietly tore out all the blank leaves. "These may be of use to someone else," he said. "They can never be of any use to me." He placed the blank leaves on the table, far in from the edge. "The books at the office will show how my affairs stand. This can interest no one. It was only on account of the money I considered myself worth, over and above my liabilities. I'll burn it;" and then forgetting that it was summer time, and that there was no fire, he threw the book into the grate, and rose. He felt in his pocket, and found that he had his keys. Then he went into the hall, put on his hat, and left the house.

He took his way to his principal place of

business—the vast storehouse, wharf, and steam mill all combined. He opened a small postern in the main gate, trod a dark flagged passage, and reached the foot of a flight of stairs that led to the chief offices. This he ascended, and having reached his private room, lit the gas.

For a while he stood in the middle of the room, looking vacantly round him. The office was luxuriously furnished; and in the wall opposite to the table at which Mr. O'Donnell usually sat, and facing him, was the door of the strong-room.

He could hear the murmur of the water as it went by, if the engines had stopped. But the engines were going on at full speed, making money now—making money now for whom? That morning these twenty sets of stones had been whirling round, and at every rotation of each stone he, James O'Donnell, was the richer.

These stones were going round still, making money still ; but for whom now ?

It was a dismal thing to stand there realising the fact that the fruits of his forty years' hard work, sagacity, enterprise, thrift had all been squandered by someone else—had all been squandered by this Vernon, in whom he had reposed implicit confidence ; who was so pious, so sleek, so plausible, and yet had led him on into this horrible position.

He sat down in his chair, and his eyes fell upon the door of the strong-room. He had destroyed his pocket-book ; his interest in his own private affairs was at an end. From what he had heard there was no chance of his saving a sixpence out of his large fortune. Some other man would work the mill no doubt, for it would be a valuable asset in the affairs of Vernon and Son.

It was hard to think of this fine mill, for which he had made the trade, and which he had

built up from the foundation, passing away from him, now that he was too old to begin life again.

In that strong-room opposite him there were the books. They were all in perfect order. *They* had never been made the slaves of a false balance-sheet. They were the fair records of blameless transactions. Every line in them could be verified. Every shilling of expense could be accounted for.

Soon, very soon, he knew not exactly when, strangers would come and examine these books, and go through all the vouchers, but they should find nothing in that strong-room of his except flawless records of honest trade—and——

The vacant look left his eyes. All at once an intense, eager light burned in them. He grasped the back of the chair, and rose stealthily, as though to avoid the attention of someone acting as sentinel over him, and who was half asleep.

He stole noiselessly in the bright gaslight across the room. With elaborate caution he took the keys out of his pocket and fitted one to the lock.

With a dull, heavy sound the bolts fell back. He drew himself a foot away, as though he expected that door to be pushed open, and something to issue forth and seize him and do him deadly hurt.

He paused, breathing heavily. The door did not stir.

He stretched forth his arm and drew the door towards him. It yielded slowly and swung out into the bright, handsomely furnished office, until it stood at right angles to the wall.

Again he paused, and peered into the dark cavity before him. He seized the outer edge of the door and steadied himself by it, leaned against it slightly so that it swayed slowly to and fro a little.

His face was now flushed and covered with sweat. His hands clutched the door feverishly, frantically. His knees trembled so that he seemed in danger of sinking to the floor.

“It would be a fit ending to my life. My life is of no further use to me or to those I love, or to the business I have made, nor even would it be any use to those whom I shall not be able to pay. For although no one could work the business as well as I, if things had not come to this pass, I am too old now to work for others where I have so long worked for myself.”

He let go the door and stood unsupported for a while.

“If they should find in the strong-room of James O'Donnell nothing but the unimpeachable records of his honest life, and his bones!”

He seemed to gather strength from the thought. He drew himself up to his full height. The look of intense excitement

gradually faded from his face. The tension of his hands relaxed, and he looked around with something like majesty in his gaze.

He was a lion at bay, but indifferent.

He walked up and down the room two or three times calmly, deliberately, as if he were disturbed by a thought greater than the hourly commonplaces of a busy day.

He ran the matter carefully over in his mind. When in thinking of this deed first, and saying to himself his creditors would find nothing in that place but books, papers, and—he had paused at the word revolver. It was occasionally necessary for some of his clerks to carry large sums of cash a distance from Rathclare, and when doing so the messenger always took with him his revolver.

The lock by which the strong-door was finally secured could be turned only from the outside, but there was a strong latch of three large bolts which caught and kept the door closed when it was slammed.

There were two keys to this door, but he had made it a rule never to entrust the second to anyone in his employment. When unable to be at his office at ten o'clock in the morning, or at closing time in the evening, he had always given the key he now carried with him to his manager, and had it left at his house the same night. The second key he had hidden behind some books in a bookcase which he always kept locked.

But the three bolts which kept the door fast during the working hours of the day could be shot back from the outside by means of a key, a duplicate of which the manager had.

In the strong-room that night there was a sum in cash of more than two thousand pounds.

If he went into that strong-room and used that revolver, the sound would, in all likelihood, reach the ears of no one in the place, and nothing would be discovered for several days, as no one would suspect the main bolts were not shot, since he had been seen to lock



the safe that day, and no one else could unlock it.

He made up his mind that, come what might, he would end his life where his fortune had begun, and where now his ruin was complete.

And still he could not think of bidding adieu for ever to the scene of his life-long labours without one more look at the books which had been so honestly kept, and which he had hoped to hand down unblemished to his son Eugene.

He took up a lamp which lay on one of the side tables, lit it, stepped into the strong-room, and drew the door sharply after him.

There was a loud bang. The three bolts shot into their places.

He was now in the strong-room with the records of his honest life, a revolver, his power of retreat cut off, and the determination not to survive the night of ruin.

He had forgotten to put out the gas in his office.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

THE strong-room was about ten feet by fifteen, and no more than eight feet high. There were presses in it for the books, and an iron safe in which the cash and securities were kept. This safe, standing on tressels in a corner, was the one used by the house before the business expanded to its present dimensions. Upon it the old man set his lamp, and putting two deed-boxes one on the other, he placed them near the safe for a seat. Then he opened the safe, and taking out some of the securities it contained, placed them beside him. He adjusted his spectacles, and turned over the deeds and shares somewhat listlessly.

The documents here represented a vast sum of money. Here were deeds on which he held mortgages, title-deeds, stocks, and shares.

He did not undo the tapes. He knew them all by sight, when and how he had acquired them. This was the result of one speculation, that of another. In his will this and this were left for life to his wife, and afterwards to his son and his son's children. This and this and this were to go absolutely to his son.

He went on thus through all the documents in the safe. There was no hurry. It was still many hours to daylight. If all were over with him before people were stirring, all would be well. He had cut off his retreat. He could not now get out of that room even if he wished it.

He felt glad that he had come in here. This was a kind of antechamber to the other

world. There was no going back now, and if he could derive any consolation from the contemplation of the past by the light of these records, he might do so without injuring anyone.

Ay, these were for Eugene. What would be his boy's fate? No doubt he would recover from the hurt, for he was young and hearty. But then how would he get a living? All his life he had been used to good things, and looking forward to a career of remarkable prosperity. Now he was a beggar, an outcast from fortune. These properties and moneys had been intended for him. Now they would go to the greedy creditors of Vernon and Son.

It was too bad that just at the very moment his boy had made up his mind to marry, everything should be swept away from them. For some years the only anxiety he had felt was that his boy should marry some

good amiable girl, and settle down in Rathclare, so that he (the father) might feel that the successor to his business was at hand in case anything should happen to himself.

He had not wished for money with the wife of his son. He had not wished for any social advancement. He was not a man who believed in family or society advancement. He wished his son to be an honest and prosperous trader in his native town, and when that sweet 'girl had been to their home a few times, he began to regard her as already his daughter. He had intended making her a wedding-present independent of what he was to do for Eugene. Here was what he had intended for her. These were the title-deeds of Rose Cottage, Glengowra, which would do the young people for their summer home. It was a famous cottage for flowers, and there was grass for a cow, and there was a paddock, and a little lawn, and a

large garden. Just the thing altogether for a young couple in the summer time.

Let him look at what the property consisted of. He read over slowly the recital of all the things that went with Rose Cottage, the measurements of the land, and so on, as though he were about to buy, and it was necessary to be careful. Then he folded up the paper softly, and tied it with the tape, and set it by him on the ground.

He was not an imaginative man, but the few images which had visited him seemed all the more brilliant, because of their rareness. And one of the visions which had come to him lately, and which pleased him more than any other he had known for years, was that of Eugene and Nellie living in this Rose Cottage, and he and his wife coming out in the cool evening and having tea with them in the little harbour overlooking the sea.

It would be strange and delightful, now

that the vigour of his youth and the strength of his manhood had passed away for ever, to be the guest of his own son; to hear his son say, "Welcome, father," and to see this tall, fair girl, who had such bright and pleasant ways, tending to his good-hearted, kindly old wife, Mary. To see her placing the chair of honour for her, and making much of her, would be a thing to live for and enjoy. And then, later, there would be children who would call him grandfather, and, with their fresh young voices and gallant spirits, take away the feeling of toil and the weariness of years.

What would Mary do? Mary, whom he had married long ago; and yet, now that he had come to the end of his life, it seemed but yesterday. He could see every event of their marriage-day more clearly than he could see what had happened yesterday; for his eyes had grown dim since then, and the magic

charm of memory is that it forgets so well what it does not wish to retain.

Bah! It would never do to think of those times, and of his old Mary left alone and poor upon the world. It would take the resolution out of him to think of her. It would rob him of his manhood to picture her destitute in the face of unsympathetic men. No. It would rob him of the last remains of vigour to fancy her standing alone and deserted, without a home or a meal. He had come into that room for the purpose of closing his life with his business career. Eugene was young and full of spirits, and had many friends, and would soon get something to do, and be able to give his mother a little, and to marry.

He must not take a gloomy view of the future for those he was leaving behind. If he wanted to keep up his resolution he must think of the future he was losing in this



great crash. It was of Eugene and Eugene's wife he must think. The fact that he could be of no further use to his son, or his wife, or his son's wife, was the thought to keep him to his resolution. If things had gone otherwise with him he could have made those young lives so happy as far as worldly gear was concerned. What further use was he on earth? Let him leave all at once. Why should he confront this trouble and disgrace—trouble unearned, disgrace unmerited?

He took up the documents from the floor and replaced them all carefully in the safe. It was in this safe the money was kept. He pulled out the drawer containing it. A week ago he would have thought this a comparatively small sum. Now it seemed very large indeed. If it had been only so managed that this two thousand pounds could have been honestly saved from the wreck, it would have been sufficient to provide, in an humble way—

but there! Let the thought go. Nothing could be saved—not a shilling.

He closed the drawer, and then drew out the one next to it.

This contained the revolver.

The light of the lamp so fell that when the drawer was fully out only the barrel of the weapon was in the light.

The old man stood looking at that glittering barrel. It was as though that barrel was a deadly snake slowly issuing from the darkness, and he was powerless to move, to avoid it.

Once more all his strength forsook him. His face flushed, his limbs trembled; he clasped his hands convulsively. He drew back a pace and almost fell against the opposite side. He put his hand before his eyes and groaned.

“Has it come to this with me,” he said, “in my old age? Can it be possible, I, who never

did a dishonest act, must fly from life because of the dishonesty of another ? ”

He put his hand up to his neck and tore his shirt open. He dropped his hands, threw up his head and looked around him. “Great God ! what is this ? ”

The lamp was burning blue. His head was giddy. He was suffocating !

## CHAPTER XIX.

SUFFOCATING? Yes; there could be no doubt about it!

Up to this, James O'Donnell had forgotten that the strong-room was almost air-tight, and that the air required by him and the lamp was about what should have been exhausted since he entered the room. For years he had been familiar with the great safe, and it had never before occurred to him that to shut any man up in it for a lengthened period would be almost certainly death.

Was he to die of suffocation, and under the circumstances of his present position?

Already his thoughts were becoming

obscured. There was the revolver gleaming at him from the drawer. But his thoughts had taken a circuitous route ; and although he knew that a short time ago the revolver had formed the main portion of an important design, he now could not connect it clearly or coherently with that intention. He was altogether occupied with the thought of suffocation, and but partially able to concern his mind with any other idea.

How would it be if he died here, and of the death that threatened him ? How would it be ?

He could not answer. He did not know. He felt a tightness across his forehead, an oppression upon his chest. The tightness and the oppression were little more than uncomfortable. He had scarcely a pain. In fact, he felt a pleasant languor out of which it would be a decided inconvenience to raise himself.

Then for a moment it came forcibly home to him that he was dying, and would die before succour of any kind could reach him.

The motives which had led him to come there at such an hour, and which induced him to shut himself up and cut off all retreat, were now obscure. By a great effort he could dimly perceive that something was wrong with his business concerns.

What was that?

A noise without! A noise at the other side of the heavy iron door. Who or what could make a noise outside there in the private office at such an hour? It was within the duty of no one to be in his private office at this hour. No one could now be there for any honest purpose.

The propinquity of the material sounds enabled them to appeal to his reason more forcibly than the murmur of the mill or the

river, or the tumultuous, distracting echoes of disaster beating through his brain.

All at once the sounds, his physical and financial position, converged and were focussed upon a single relic of memory. Long ago, in some book he had read of a famous cave called "The Cave of Dogs," somewhere in the south of Europe, where, when men and dogs entered together, the dogs were suffocated by the exhalation lying close to the ground, while the men, because of their greater stature, moved on unharmed. He knew at this brief moment of active memory the same substance which now threatened his life proved fatal to these dogs.

If he now raised himself higher in his suffocating chamber, was there any likelihood of prolonging his life by seeking air as high up as possible in the room? It is true he had no great desire to prolong his life. He had by this time forgotten he had had any desire

to destroy it. Yes, he would see if any virtue of life lay in the air above his head.

He mounted upon the deed-boxes and thrust his head up.

Now he had pains and a tingling sensation, but the dimness and dulness of the intellect gradually diminished.

The noise was repeated without. What could it be? His mind had by this time become comparatively clear. He now knew he had come to that place for the purpose of destroying his life, with the intention of obliterating the world from his perception simultaneously with the destruction of his fortune.

But what were those noises which again broke in upon his ear?

Now he remembered. There was a considerable sum of money in cash in the strong-room. Some thieves had got scent of this fact, and were now in the outer place with



designs upon the gold and notes lying in the safe ?

If these wretches broke in when he was dead and carried off the money, and his dead body was found later there (his head was so stupid, that he could not see exactly what the inference would be), would it not seem in some way or other that he had applied the two thousand pounds to his own purposes—given them to his wife or son, say—and then destroyed himself ?

Although he felt relieved from the suffocation he had endured in the lower air, he knew now that this relief could not last long, and that the air he now breathed would soon become as tainted as that which he had lately left.

What should he do ?

To die in the midst of his commercial troubles—to die, leaving behind him an unblemished reputation, and to die the seeming

thief of a paltry two thousand pounds, were widely different things.

And yet he did not appear to have much room for choice, for should he continue as he now was and make no sign, he would, beyond doubt, die of suffocation ; and if he made any sign and these men had the means to break in, and did break in before assistance came, they would no doubt sacrifice his life rather than forego their design of plunder.

He paused for a moment in thought. Then, holding his breath, he stepped down, took the revolver out of the safe, and got up on the deed-boxes once more.

"I shall sell my life dearly," he said to himself, "if they force that door."

Standing bolt upright on the deed-boxes, he fixed his eyes steadily on the only means of ingress to that room.

"It is not likely," he thought, "there are more than two or three of these ruffians, and

I have six shots here. But how long will this air last? How long is it possible for a man to live on the eighteen inches more air I have gained since I mounted these boxes? For a man and—a lamp? I don't want the lamp. I have seen here all I desire to see. If they break in I will have no difficulty in seeing them, for my eyes will be accustomed to impenetrable darkness, while they must carry a light of some kind, which will enable me to make them out. I and the lamp. It is as though there was food in a ship for a certain time for two people. If the one dies the other will have the double share. If the lamp or I die now the survivor will have the double share. In this case the choice is easily made."

He filled his lungs and blew down the chimney of the lamp.

The darkness of the strong-room was now so intense that it was absolutely impossible

to see any object, however large or however near. For all the purposes of sight the space enclosed by the four walls was an absolute void. The old man, of course, knew he was standing on two deed-cases in the strong-room of his business place; that he held a revolver in his hand; that there were burglars without and money within, and that he was threatened with suffocation. The question now was, whether they would succeed in bursting open that door before the rising tide of poisonous gas reached his nostrils.

The lamp being now extinguished, and there being some ventilation to the safe, the deadly gas, which would be sufficient to destroy life, was rising at a greatly diminished rate. A little of the heavy carbonic acid succeeded in exuding through the lower portion of the slight spaces between the door, threshold, and jambs; a little of the pure

exterior air infiltrated through the upper portion of the slight spaces between the door, lintel, and jambs.

James O'Donnell had no means of knowing at what rate the deadly gas was now rising, or whether it had ceased to rise at all, or whether it was declining. It was not impossible, nay, it was not improbable, that the deadly vapour might rise no higher than it had stood when he put out the lamp.

It would not do for him to make the least noise, for the gas might still be rising, and in case he made a noise the burglars might be scared away for a time, only to return when he had succumbed to the deadly vapour, break open the room, and so blast his character for ever.

It was now necessary for him to stand bolt upright in that ebon darkness, with his eyes fixed on what he knew to be the position occupied by the door. Then, as soon as

anyone opened that door, it would be his duty to fire, and to fire with as deadly an effect as possible, for he was an old man, no longer strong or active, and could not hope to succeed against even one man who would undertake such an enterprise, and the chances were there would be more than one in this.

He had no means of computing time. In the disordered condition of his mind it was impossible to tell how the minutes went by. Now for some minutes the sounds in the outer room had ceased. Any moment they might be renewed. There would, of course, be a sound of hammering, although the sound would be very dull. He had once seen a burglar's hammer. It was made of lead, the face of it being covered with leather soaked in oil. The wedges used were always of wood. But no matter how muffled the blow, or how little noise the progress of the wedge made, the sound could not escape his ear.

He took out his watch and listened to it. He counted the ticks, but found they conveyed no idea of time. The very sound of the watch confused his senses, and threw him into new perplexities. Holding the watch to his ear, and the revolver in his right hand down by his side, he stood motionless for what seemed to him a very long time.

It was strange, but still he heard no sounds of hammering. Could it be that the first effect of the poisonous gas upon him had been to disturb his senses, and that the noises he fancied he heard had been the offspring of imagination ?

Ah ! They were beginning at last. He caught the sound of their first attempts. He knew it would take a considerable time to break in that door, and mentally he groaned at the notion of delay in his present perilous condition.

Suddenly he started as though he had been shot.

The door swung open rapidly on its hinges. The full light of the office sprang with dazzling effect into the darkness where he stood. He was paralysed.

“Seize him!” cried a voice from without.

Then all at once, and before he had time to raise the arm in which he held the weapon, he was in the clutches of two men, who dragged him out ruthlessly into the glare of the office, and then started back from him.

“It is the master himself!”

James O'Donnell staggered for a moment, dazed by the gaslight and the perception that the men who held him were no burglars, but the watchmen of the place, and that behind the door, as it now stood fully open with the day-key in it, was the manager of all his business, Corcoran.

When the watchmen made up their minds what to do they sent for Mr. Corcoran. He brought the key with him; and then all three,



having taken off their boots, stole into the private office, and finding no clue there, the manager, with little hope of discovering anything, put his day-key into the lock, turned the bolt swiftly, and, to his astonishment, pulled open the door. His astonishment rose to perfect amazement when he found a man inside, and when that man turned out to be no less a person than James O'Donnell.

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END OF VOL. I.

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